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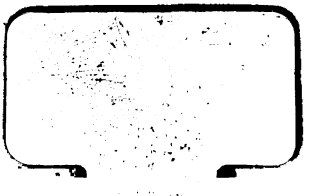

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# WRITING ENGLISH PROSE

BY

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"ENGLISH COMPOSITION AND STYLE," "STUDIES IN STRUCTURE AND STYLE," ETC.

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# WRITING ENGLISH PROSE

## CHAPTER I

### WRITING AND THE STUDY OF ENGLISH COMPOSITION

THE familiar jest that a man begins to write by chewing the end of his pencil, — or, now-a-days, of his typewriter, — is based on the tradition that writing is a very difficult act. Such words as *style* and *composition* suggest something that is outside the achievement of ordinary mortals, and in thinking of these terms most of us, with that idealism common to humanity, are likely to shut our eyes to all but the finer aspects of writing. There is, however, no cause for alarm. The truth of the matter, as Mr. Chesterton would say, is, first, that writing, along with speaking, eating, sleeping, putting on clothes, and coming out of the rain, is one of the great universal acts of modern life. In the second place, it is also true that writing is in its finer aspects comparatively rare, a distinction which it shares with speaking, cookery, dressing, house-building, and the sleep of a tranquil and untroubled mind.

This common act of writing may be conveniently called informal composition; there is no need to enlarge on the amount and variety of



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this writing that is actually being done in the world. Each of the countless compositions that see the light of each new day is a specific product, be it an epigram, a business letter, a sermon, an epic poem, or an associated press despatch. To better any of these specific products must evidently be the aim of any study of English composition. The study may be very elementary and occasional, or it may be elaborate and prolonged, but it has in view the same end as the study of any other active human process, the improvement of results, of whatever kind, through the means at one's disposal.

How is this done? In general, the common way is evidently for a man to find out what he wishes to say, to write it down, to look it over and, if necessary, to revise it, and then to present it to whom it concerns. In this act you make use of any knowledge or advice that may be needful or handy for the bettering of the product. The great questions likely to be applied by anybody, at any time, to any piece of writing, are these: "Does it say what was intended?" "Is it intelligible?" "Is it said in as interesting and as agreeable a manner as is possible or necessary?" Answers to these questions are never twice alike; for the subject, the detail, and the occasion of no two pieces are the same. Writing, like talk, is nearly always directed to particular people or groups of people, to the end that they may be informed, or enlightened, or interested, or per-

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suaded. Any study whatever of literary composition is, therefore, in the first instance, simply the human process of making more intelligible or more interesting or more persuasive what you are going to write or what you have written; and in the process you employ whatever forethought or knowledge or skill or criticism you care to command. That is the gist of the whole matter which is the subject of this book.

It has more than once been remarked in the course of the present series of books that most of our sciences originate in our humbler ideas and necessities, and are really nothing more than an exact statement and thorough development of them. Thus logic, the so-called "science of sciences," is also one of the original and constant accompaniments of our mental life; it has, however, been studied and formalized into the difficult mass of material that confronts us in the pages of Mill and Jevons and other most useful writers. In like manner, out of the multifarious acts and products that have been mentioned above there has arisen a mass of knowledge and doctrine that we may call formal English composition, the art of arts for the English writing race, in that it has to do with the great practice of written communication by means of the English language. On this subject there are literally hundreds of books; the present book is one of them. These books evidently cannot plan, or write, or revise your work for you, nor can they give you

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that personal and particular counsel that is needful in any actual writing. What they try to do will be described in this chapter; the remaining chapters will try to do it so far as space permits, for lack of which no account of spoken prose or of versification, subjects evidently belonging to English composition, will be attempted.

In order better to understand the nature of the study of formal English composition, let us give a brief account of the medium of writing in English and of certain general conditions that accompany the act. Many of these are common, as will appear, to writing in all languages and also to speaking. On them all sensible study of English composition must be based; you cannot get away from them, and any theory of writing that tried to avoid them would be wild and useless.

The medium is the English language. That language is better understood to-day, in a scientific and historical sense, than ever before; what it is historically and actually has been described by Mr. Pearsall Smith in his book in this series. What we know of the history of the language has, however, very little to do with that composition that we all practise, and even in the formal study of the subject is valuable only in a very small way. The instrument as it is — that is what we have to work with; we do not to-day use the language of Chaucer, and five hundred years

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hence our descendants will probably be expressing themselves in a way that to us would seem as strange. It may be remarked incidentally that, for the purposes of English composition as it is to-day, the chief value of our modern scientific study of the language lies in its encouragement of freedom and even of innovation in expression, and, generally of course, in telling something of the instrument which we daily employ. That instrument is the present, actual, constantly shifting, and often colloquial body of words, in which every man has varying proprietary rights. It is what you find accounted for in good dictionaries, up to within a few years of actual usage. For present purposes, it may be described as (1) a main stream of familiar and intelligible words, standing for current ideas and customary objects, and also as (2) a number of side currents, rills, tributaries, pools, eddies, standing for local, technical, learned, affected, poetical, slang, obsolete, vulgar, literary, and various other vocabularies for special ideas and interests which may at any time fall under a writer's hand. Knowledge of English composition is, first, some working knowledge of the meanings and associations of English words.

But words, for the most part, have value only when combined into sentences. Though we may often converse in monosyllables and short phrases, the sentence is the chief instrument for the statement of fact. The remark is true of any language,

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and it is perhaps futile here to attempt to describe anything so variable and yet so well known as the English sentence. It would seem to call for a commonly understood English syntax, that is to say, the relation of words as ordinarily used in English, a relation which is formally analyzed in grammars. This arrangement is probably much freer than the syntax of most other modern languages, and is dependent more on the order than on the form of words. Here again a writer has so to combine words into sentences that he will ordinarily be understood.

One or two matters of fact should be noted. Whatever a writer says, whatever combinations of words into sentences he uses to express an idea, will not be precisely like any other combination ever made, unless it be the stock phrase or the stock sentence. Otherwise, he would have the grace to use quotation marks. The combination, however, cannot be a lawless one; it is bound by the ideas to be expressed, by the ordinary meanings and associations of words, and by preceding and following sentences. However original and erudite the idea, it has, as a matter of fact, to be expressed mainly by words from the current stream of English, words used in their ordinary meaning, modified possibly by the writer's ideas of suitability or taste, or his desire to include such by-products as originality and style.

Hence any written product is very largely

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made up not only of ordinary English words but also of expressions that may be called "stock." Stock phrases are often the sport of stylists and rhetoricians. The objection that they are worn and hackneyed, have lost all their edge, is true of many of the words that we meet in everyday writing, but not of the majority. As a matter of fact, stock expressions indicate a natural tendency against which it is wasteful to strive. They are an intellectual shorthand; most of the business of life is done by their aid; they help us, like habits and customs. A business letter, for example, is usually a series of stock expressions — standing for facts, observations, indignation, surprise, remonstrance, request, — interspersed with special data to fit occasions. So, too, are most sermons, editorials, government reports, stump speeches, and many other good things. Hence "complete letter-writers," Marconi codes, telephone talks, etc. Even great men of letters cannot spend all their time in trumping up new ideas and facts, in coining new phrases to fit them, or in giving new life to old words; but must, for the most part, take refuge in phrases that have been used a hundred times before. A certain type of mind, indeed, is worried by phrases that have not been used a hundred times before, condemning all innovations as "bad English." The only real objection to stock expression is that it may not stand for stock ideas. Since most ideas are common enough, ready-made phrases are indispen-

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sable. Even the most original writer, the highly technical writer, the poet, the racy raconteur, the amateur of slang, the American journalist, — any man whose language is a little out of custom, — is aberrant only in a very small percentage of instances; he darts occasionally to the sides of the stream or momentarily flounders in an eddy.

It is also true of language that though, ideally, no two combinations of words into sentences mean exactly the same thing, yet a dozen different ways of expressing an idea may, in actual practice, be equally good. I could have said, had I not hit upon the other phrase first, that, among several different ways of saying a thing, it would be hard to choose the best; or I could have said that it really makes little difference which of a dozen or more similar phrases a writer chooses, provided all are clear, grammatical, and truly state some fact. These three versions do not mean quite the same thing, but the differences are of very slight moment; in ordinary and untechnical discourse they would be disregarded. So-called "inevitable phrases" are very rare in prose, rarer than in poetry, where verse at once demands more restriction and permits more freedom for fancy, for dislocation of normal order, and for that unexpectedness of word and phrase which is highly prized in literature and is beyond rule and precedent. It is quite possible to rephrase many of the sentences, not only of our good, but

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also of our famous, prose writers, without so seriously impairing them that any but a very few delicate ears would perceive the difference. So precise a person as Matthew Arnold misquotes Keats's "Pure ablution round Earth's human shores" as "cold ablution" without a blush and under circumstances that called for great accuracy (*Maurice de Guérin*, in *Essays in Criticism*). Stevenson, himself a devotee of the theory of the fine phrase, is quite right in saying that "perfect sentences are rare and perfect pages rarer."

This necessarily brief description of the English language will not be complete for the purpose of sketching the bases of the study of composition without the mention of another fact that is common to all languages. An inherent condition for expression in any language is progression. When a thing has to be said it has to be said by words, and these words have to follow one another. When we read, we have to take in ideas piecemeal; we cannot see a whole production at a glance, but have to take time to listen or to read. The rate may be fifty words a minute to five hundred, according to one's skill in "reading short." In any event meaning is conveyed by a series of approximations; and, whether we think about the matter or not, we are, in all literary composition, bound to be progressives. On this fact of progression — of progression from word to word, from sentence to sentence, from paragraph to paragraph — must

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necessarily be founded any rational notion of written composition.

But, besides these facts of language that have been recited, there are other conditions that go with the act of writing, and on them also rhetoric must be based. *Conditions* is a much better word to use than *principles* or *laws*, words formerly and often still much in vogue. Such words are very impressive; but, to speak in simple truth, there are no laws of style or composition, in any strict sense, and the principles are, for the most part, chiefly conveniences. "Conditions of writing" is a much more intelligible phrase to found a theory of composition on than is "laws of style." Of this some more will be said later in the chapter; what is meant by the term "conditions" may now be illustrated by saying that the great condition of all communication, written or spoken, is intelligibility. Language also exists that we may unburden our minds in our own behalf, whence, among many other things, poetry and profanity; and it is also a condition of communication that we put a good foot forward, that, in short, we try to be as interesting as possible. It is of certain developments of these conditions that we have to speak.

These conditions result from the fact that language is the great means of communication, that its method is progressive, and that, wilful deception aside, we ordinarily try to make ourselves as intelligible and as interesting as we may. To

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be clear, a writer should surely know his facts, or, in other words, what he wishes to say; he should think in an orderly way about them; and he should use words and sentences that his readers will understand. Interest, too, implies several conditions, and there are also conditions arising from the act of writing and publication. The formal study of English composition does not bear equally on all these matters; some will be treated at greater length in the following chapters, but the more important may be briefly mentioned at this point. They are not technical but very human matters.

Unless a writer conforms to the condition of knowing his facts, his own mind, or what he wishes to say, he is likely to fall into all kinds of vagueness, obscurity, and error. That is what we have in mind when we use such terms as "clear-headed" or "confused" or "muddle-minded." Now this general statement implies several other things that help to describe the act of writing. Facts to be expressed may be matters of observation, of record, of information; that is to say, a man may write about what he sees, or reads, or is told. They may be comments and reactions on these things; hence argument, criticism, bickering, anger, exegesis, opinions, and many other marks of the independent mind. They may also be matters of imagination, which supplies us with our novels, our poetry, and most of our entertainment. If the facts are

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those of observation, clear expression calls for a noting of the phenomena as accurately and definitely as is possible. If a writer is repeating things that have been told him, conformity to what has been told him may be all that is required: an elaborate procedure has been devised in law, for example, simply to extract truth, and hence clearness of fact. In dealing with records, that is with literature, or facts that are beyond the reach of observation and hearsay, a writer, to be clear, to know what he wishes to say, has evidently to look up facts where they are to be found, — in libraries, in newspaper files, in learned reports, and other mausoleums where their visible shell is laid away. Of comments and reactions, agreements and disagreements, the more precisely a writer knows his own mind the clearer his expression is likely to be. Here again, however, he is likely to arrive at clearer results if he checks his immediate personal reactions by some regard for fact, justice, and logic. Such checking, indeed, always goes on in some way; it may be thorough, casual, conscientious, temperamental, stubborn, or what not, even though the writer never heard formally of justice, logic, or English composition. Clearness is, in a sense, truth. The human aspect of the matter is this, — that whereas a writer may banish into outer darkness all facts and observations not immediately apparent to him, the better part is to try to nurse the tender suggestion and clarify the

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vague concept, to appropriate facts with free hand. The common charge brought by English critics against Macaulay, that he dealt with the immediately apparent, is an illustration of the growing notion that the kind of clearness that is obtained by exclusions is not of so high an order as that which comes from meeting and thinking out any difficulty that may arise. Important as is this matter, it cannot be further treated in the present book.

A fitter subject for detailed study is the condition of order, to which a good deal of time is actually given in the formal study of composition. In general, order simply means that, whatever the facts, some arrangement of them is necessary, if for no other reason than to do them justice. Conditions of time, space, and language prevent things from being thought of or said or written all at once. Nobody, even if he has never heard tell of the matter, likes topsy-turvy construction, that mark of the untrained mind. Even if our ideas come pell-mell, they have to be recast for human consumption; otherwise we may get intellectual indigestion or spiritual strangulation. Ideas do, as a matter of fact, spring from one another, are associated with and suggested by one another; a natural condition of writing is to follow their lead. The formal study of English composition utilizes this natural sense for progression; it attempts to show how progression may be trimmed and confined, how it

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may be expanded and modified, how unnecessary water may be squeezed out, how the inexpert swimmer may escape the backwash and the eddy.

Another condition of nearly all writing is some regard for the capacity or the state of mind of the reader. This means several things. In the first place a writer is obliged to use a common coin of ideas and words; he is likely to think in terms and at least to start from ideas that a reader will understand. Few things are more distressingly funny to one who knows anything about the English language than to see the efforts made by certain misguided amateurs to get away from common words and to use odd and antic expressions. Again, no writer is likely to tell all he knows in any one instance; he says as much as is necessary at the time or as comes to him to say. Nor do you have to be a Sunday-school superintendent to speak to babes and sucklings in different terms from what you would use about your business. It is the amusement of some people to fancy that we should always write to the "average intelligent reader," or in such a way that anybody will understand us without previous training. It is true that the great mass of writing must be made up of ideas of ordinary quality and must be expressed in plain, intelligible English words. But, aside from the fact that the "average intelligent reader" is a figment, we do almost always write for particular people; for particular readers as

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represented in the subscribers for the paper or the pew; or for our own amusement and gratification. If we were always obliged to write for the "average" mind, there would evidently be very little verse, or technical writing, or scholarly production. Obviously the formal study of English composition can tell you very little about audiences, which are nearly always particular, except to adjure you not to bore them or insult them, or otherwise to act in an inhuman manner toward them.

Hence arises a curious paradox, that writing to be clear, to do its duty of communication, has largely to deal with the unknown. The remark is true whether writing be looked at as the adding of material to the extant body of literature or as the act of addressing a reader or a group. The reader of your letter, of your description, your novel, your lecture, does not want to be told what he knows already; he will usually skip what is familiar to him, unless said in a highly interesting and alluring way or with new decorations of thought, originality, and style. We go to encyclopedias, cook-books, volumes of the Home University Library for information that we hadn't before, or, what amounts to the same thing, for the refreshment of our memory or for new light. We read novels, essays, poems, and other works of so-called literary art, because they are specifically different from one another and not precisely like anything else that was ever

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said, however much they may be alike in general form, "note," and type. The idea of plagiarism is based on the principle that writings should be new in notion or style, or should be made for a new audience. We are nearly all Athenians in our desire "to hear or to tell some new thing."

Exceptions to these remarks are more apparent than real. Even that large class of readers, as of listeners, for example, that love to bask in the sunshine of daily denunciation, by their chosen sheet, of the doings, character, and measures of political opponents, like to be treated to a new set of adjectives of anathema. The ideas may appear as "eternal truths," as that the "Democratic party is the enemy of the Republic," or that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is destroying the English Constitution, or that the Germans are taking away our trade, or that America should be for the Americans, or that Messrs. John J. McGraw and C. B. Fry are the greatest exponents of certain branches of sport that ever were; but we like to have the phraseology varied from day to day. Hence arises the lively or the solemn journalistic style. It is of course necessary to repeat commands, often many times, to get them through the inattentive or obtuse head, to convey information at all. But even the classical instance, "Sire, remember the Athenians," is not of sufficient weight to upset the general fact that writing as a specific process must deal chiefly with new things. Even our

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old and favorite books we read to get anew into an unfamiliar world. We must then regard the aim of the writing that is actually going on at any time to be the communication of information, of interesting facts, feelings, impressions, beliefs, ideas, problems, etc., to readers who are, or are imagined to be, not wholly familiar with these things.

Formal English composition cannot help you very much in getting new things; it can merely point out the necessity. Nor can it tell you much about new points of view, which are the material of special departments of human activities; or of new tricks of style, which are the emanations of cheap or of gifted minds. There is no rule for original expression. The general condition of interest, however, suggests several interesting conditions of writing that may be spoken of. Interest manifests itself in many ways; it is commonly called the emotional side of writing as opposed to the intellectual side, which calls for clearness. It is, however, simpler to say that interest is whatever makes us read things that we don't have to read for information or under compulsion. The condition of interest is inherent in human nature. The most conscientious reader or the most devoted writer is apt to strike when he is bored. Dullness is often thought to be the worst of defects, and the problem of writing in an interesting way is an even greater human problem than making it clear, in propor-

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tion as dullness is more grievous than obscurity. Now a writer is not likely to be interesting if his ideas are hazy, if he doesn't know his facts, if he is uncertain of his own mind; if, in short, he is tongue-tied at the start. Though it is evident that many of the most compelling and influential of writings cannot be outlined or restated in exact terms, interest must usually depend on clearness of thought, of arrangement, of expression.

With interest, as with clearness, custom and convention come to one's aid with a great array of topics that are perennially enthralling. Thus parents are usually interested in the doings of their children, wishing to hear about them or to proclaim them; the details of a man's business and its proper conduct supply by the thousand examples of those interests that are scorned in literature as commercial; certain classes of readers are always eager to hear the tales of undying, misguided, or mistaken love supplied by newspapers and novels; we assume that our friends will listen to our tale of weal or woe; we rejoice in reading of war, prize-fighting, politics, panics, fires, strikes, explosions, executions, murders, cricket, baseball, the Derby, the general election, the Inauguration ball, the opening of Parliament, and the millions of ready-made interests, where procedure is prepared and the audience expectant. All of these may supply occasions for composition; the point is that the writer is met half-way by things that people like to

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hear about. Knowledge of the interests of men is one side of the matter, is a great condition of writing. Hence arise professional purveyors to these interests, of various descriptions, — literary hacks, journalists, men of letters, preachers, orators, and many other very useful members of the community.

However much a writer may use the common vehicles of communication or may study the interests of his readers, it is probable that the great natural basis for interesting communication is the condition that one should be interested in what one is saying. That, indeed, may beget a bore, but it is also probably the frame of mind of all who have succeeded in making literature or in moving audiences, as also of any one who has done his business well, or has written good letters or books of travel, or has entertained theories or courted facts of any kind. To have enthusiasm does not necessarily mean that one should lie awake nights or, school-girlishly, be filled with thoughts that threaten to explode in ecstasy. It is more likely to mean a reasonable concern for some subject and a willingness to take some time and thought to say what has to be said about it. In great pieces of literature it means much more than this.

We have seen that any specific act of writing usually is the threefold process of planning, writing, and revision. Each of these acts may be very simple and casual, or, at the other extreme,

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may demand much preparation and pains. Hence there is an interesting condition, of a more mechanical kind than those before mentioned, that is imposed by the difference between spoken and written language. Omitting any profound considerations of the origin of speech and the written alphabet, we can readily see that the publication of ideas — and they have no significance until published in some form — is different in speaking and in writing. By publication, of course, is meant the promulgation or presentation of any idea whatever to the person or persons for whom it is intended. Now the structure of speech is ordinarily loose, though not invariably so; that is to say, we proceed, except in prepared speeches, by a series of approximations, of parts and fragments of a mass of ideas, and we revise and clarify our ideas by successive additions, modifications, limitations, restatements, and retractions — often with much backing and filling, in short — *during the act of publication*. Writing may also do this; but any piece of written work, though open to subsequent modification, is naturally complete *before the act of publication*. Hence all written composition, before falling under the eye of the reader, may have as much rearrangement and revision as the writer may care to bestow. This condition is all in favor of written composition, and that is probably why writing may go to greater degrees of fineness than speaking. Other differences

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between writing and speaking, such as permanence of record and possibility of wide diffusion, have little to do with composition as composition, — except that they suggest the desirability of being careful with expression if words are to be coldly read rather than heard in the heat of the moment.

Here, then, are some of the more important conditions — of language, of communication, of clearness, of interest, of opportunity — with which any act of writing is beset. Call them laws, if you will; but it is sounder to regard them as facts on which formal instruction in the writing must be based.

Formal English composition, like all other studies, sports an aim or purpose. That may be described as the giving of something that will enable any student of the subject to better his own writing or any piece of writing that he may wish to improve. Any knowledge that you have of anything may help you to do this; and hence, more specifically, knowledge of English composition more commonly means knowledge of spelling, punctuation, forms of address, capitalization, grammar, theories of style, good and bad English, the art, so called, of the short story, of versification, of cross-examination, and any other of those many subjects having to do with expression on which there are very many books

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and pamphlets. It is sometimes made to include anything whatever that has any connection with form and expression; it is even made to include the collection of facts and the handling of those facts which are the special province of special sciences and arts.

Evidently a general book like the present cannot touch on all these matters; as we have seen, not all the conditions of writing can be equally well subjected to formal treatment. A general book on English composition is really a working description of the English language for the purposes of composition; it attempts to find some definition and to make some exposition of the term "well written" or "good writing," to the end that anybody may apply for himself to his own writing the knowledge there presented.

The task has never been an easy one. "Well written" is evidently one of those results better recognized in the breach than the observance; or, if positively recognized, it is better known by means of specific examples — as when we praise the rhythm of Ruskin or the paragraphs of Macaulay, — than in those more general outlines which have to make up the bulk of inclusive treatises. It is doubtful whether any active process can be reduced to statement of an exact and final sort; and this remark is specially just of so common an act as writing. If writing is, as we have seen, continually dealing with new things, if much of its value for readers lies in

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freshness of manner, if not of idea, how in particular can rules and principles be laid down for this aspect of the matter; for between *rule* and *unexpectedness* there is a contradiction in terms?

But most of us would rather go without our dinner than admit that we could not recognize a thing as well written. Natural as is this common claim to the rights of criticism of something in which, like government, or religion, or opportunity, we all have rights, there is little consensus of popular opinion as to the meaning of the term "well written." We squint at it. Thus, popularly, if a number of persons were called upon independently to express an opinion as to whether certain pieces were well written or not, the findings might readily vary from one instinct with concern for the Constitution to one that foresaw the advent of a second Burke or a greater Webster; from one that found ultimate cause for disapproval in the writer's use of the "cleft" infinitive, to one enthusiastic over a worthy addition to the great trinity of clever modern writers. Nothing is commoner than these diversities of factual and stylistic judgment, even among trained men. The diversity arises partly because other considerations — political, religious, "interested," favorite, and many others — are confused with the quasi-technical term "well written"; fact, as is often inevitable, being confounded with the expression thereof. It also arises partly because commentators are likely to take a limited view

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of the matter, and are specially susceptible to certain phenomena, — spelling, say, or grammar, or good "lines," or structure, or precision and cadence. Every man, woman, and child who ever reads anything probably sets up, more or less unconsciously, some sort of measure, if merely that of amusement, in which will be found his notion of good writing. What is common to all these notions? How may the common notions be gathered into a *vade-mecum* of fact and precept to be applied to any act of real writing, which from the nature of the act is something of a leap into the future and the dark?

It may be doubted whether any one thing is common to all these views and is, at the same time, inclusive. Certainly there is no one test of good writing, except that it does its work. Good writing is surely more than rhetorical ornamentation, that "artificial beautifier," or than conformity to literary usage, or observance of the prevailing fashion, in say, wording and cadence, or the successful search for more mysterious manifestations of "style," valuable as these things often are and much as they have from time to time figured in pursuit of the essence of expression. The trouble, in application, of any of these standards is that they may not be at all to the point; it may, for example, be, on occasion, a very good thing to write like some recognized master of style, Arnold, say, or Newman; but, on another occasion, very foolish to try to do so.

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Nor is that other side of the pursuit, the hunt for common principles, very much more useful; principles, rules, and laws to be of practical value have also to be specifically applicable; "be your self," "proper words in proper places," and other phrases of good advice get you nowhere, unless you know precisely how to apply them. The famous dictum of Spencer's that the test of style is the "economy of the reader's attention" is perhaps the most comprehensive that we have on this subject, but this, even so, calls for knowledge and experience in its application.

As a matter of fact, all our fancied "laws" of writing — the laws of the short story, of the drama, of the sentence, of the paragraph, of letter-writing (how absurd the last seems to be!) — are of very little practical value. An English writer, G. H. Lewes, once attempted in a series of essays to formulate the laws of style; but they would go very little way toward quelling linguistic riot. We may as well make up our minds at the outset that no laws of writing, at once so general as to be abiding stays and so special as to be of any use in writing, have yet been formulated. What we have are the general aims of communication, and we also have the facts of language and the conventions, customs, and conveniences that we have to employ when it comes to communicating ideas. It is much sounder to speak of these things than of laws, rules, and principles; and we must also recog-

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nize the plain fact that words, customs, conventions, and conveniences are constantly being discarded and new ones coming to birth, and that writers, even so, are doing very much as they like. A writer is limited, not by rules, laws, and precepts of writing and of style, but by *conditions;* that is, as we have seen, by his ideas, his audience, and the character of the language. The more he knows about these the better he will write. In a practical sense the study of rhetoric is a study of the conveniences of composition.

Thus, when you go to the *New English Dictionary* to assure yourself of the most usual modern meaning of a word that you have employed or would like to employ, you go to the greatest of the modern storehouses of conveniences of composition. A "don't" book, adjuring you to avoid any of the thousand expressions "commonly misused," lists, rightly or wrongly, some of the convenient things of composition; as, in like manner, do spellers, grammars, and punctuation books. The so-called principles of composition are useful only because they are sometimes conveniences of a more general sort. The application of the word "principles" to composition is pretty loose; we have not quite got over the early-Victorian habit of giving the name "principle of composition" to such things as sincerity, truthfulness, candor, respect, veneration, and various other of the seven, ten, twoscore,

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or five hundred "lamps" of writing. The present tendency is, however, to use the word "principles" in a technical rather than a moral sense. Thus unity, coherence, and emphasis are the group names for certain specific points that you may well keep your eye open for when you read or write. They are useful in so far as they serve to divide the aim of writing among several specific targets. They are convenient in that they enable a writer to localize a point of view or to look at a product in the specific way that may be most handy. They act like a plumber or a doctor, who, from long experience, can at once lay hands on the stopped pipe or the strained joint. Looked at in this way, a generalization like the "economy of the reader's attention" gains point in actual composition, though valueless without the skill of specific application to specific words and sentences.

The same splitting of aim, or breaking of fagots, or whatever else you choose to call it, occurs when, as is common practice in general books on composition, we have to treat of wording, of sentences, of paragraphs, and the like matters as separate things, to be handled and analyzed piecemeal. Actually, these matters cannot be separated in any such way as the exigencies of exposition demand. The "cinematograph" method, as Professor McDougall calls it (*Psychology*, chap. 2), has to be applied to a flowing act.

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In brief, the major fact on which the formal study of English composition must be based is this: that no one criterion of good writing can be found, that there can be no ultimate accord in the common views or the expert opinions of the matter. Any piece of literary work may be excellent in spots and inferior in others; readers in different localities may rightly set different values on the more strictly technical results of actual writing. Good writing appears, not as a ponderous engine of literary judgment or a series of rules, but now *as* unity, now *as* clearness, now *as* interest, now *as* correctness, now *as* observance of certain conventions, now *as* speaking your own mind, now *as* making your business clear, now *as* properly accepting an invitation to dine, now *as* sound wording, now *as* clever sayings, now *as* individual style, now and again *as* a great many other things. Well written is to be defined by a series of *as's*, to the number of which additions are constantly being made through the discovery of new points of view; and members are also continually falling from the ranks with the changes of language and stylistic theory. In any given case only a few of the criteria are likely to be applicable; what we know of the others we place in cold storage for the fitting occasion. That is the way rhetorical criticism actually works.

The foregoing view may be illustrated and enforced by a brief description of the way addi-

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tions are made to our practical knowledge of composition, — aside, that is, from the knowledge of the meaning of specific words and of grammatical constructions. When anybody makes a remark on the arrangement or style of any piece of writing, — as, for example, "situation not clear," or "illiterate," or "this sentence has excellent unity," — the special case may stick in his mind as the type and example of a more or less general defect or excellence. Thus a curtly put letter may remain in my mind not only as an example of particular things to be avoided, but also as an instance of a more general inconvenience that should be shunned. Hence I am more on my guard against resemblances to the fault, and I may be able to formulate some excellent general advice on the subject, illustrated by pregnant examples. So also of good things: the specific excellence I may be able to generalize into a fine principle of procedure in writing. The multiplication of principles of composition is theoretically limited only by the ingenuity of the human mind.

The facts stated in the preceding part of the chapter make quite evident several things about any formal treatise on English composition. In the first place, such a book as the present can be nothing more than a digest of the more important conveniences of composition that have been discovered and explained. The more important are

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those that, after centuries of rhetorical study, have come to be regarded as the more important. Our modern knowledge of composition is as much a growth and a result of actual experiment as anything else in the world. If, for example, we incline to disregard the learned and elaborate lists of figures of speech which are a considerable part of such books as Bain's *Rhetoric* or hesitate to spend much time over the more intricate and individual matters of style, *la vraie vérité*, the unique word, the inevitable phrase, and other delicious things, — it is because we recognize that such matters are less near and tangible than others.

It is evident also that — since formal knowledge does not quite keep up with the facts of practice, and since, except in the actual meanings of particular words, theory only roughly coincides with practice — books on English composition are merely illustrative points, or *points d'appui*, or entering wedges, or neat levers of various sizes, wherewith the writer or the critic may pry away the baser parts of written work. For, if writing is a process of planning, of writing, and of revision, formal English composition is assuredly a tinkerer. In other words, when we come to the application of general rhetorical knowledge to actual writing we find that we are usually concerned with details and excrescences. All the erudition that has been garnered into various volumes appears, on reflection, to be but something flitting about the

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edges of discourse, — adjusting detail here and there, correcting a misused or a misspelled word, cutting out a clumsy or inaccurate phrase, telling us how to conform in trifles. One of the reasons why formal English composition sometimes seems to be of little effect in training, is because our formal theories are often contending against the great common mother tongue and are sure to get the worst of the argument, reinforced, as is our actual practice, by the habits of impressionable years.

The following chapters deal, in a necessarily incomplete way, with the more important facts and the more important points to which it is usually agreed the attention of the student or the writer may profitably be directed. The virtue of any such presentation of facts lies in the possibility of its application to specific acts of writing. The bulk of the space in this book is about equally divided between *composition*, or the arrangement of material, and what for want of a better term may be called *style*, that is, words combined into sentences. A final chapter or two is given to special matters.

So far as any theory may be said to underlie the following presentation of facts it is this: that the aim of any study of English composition is to aid the student in gaining for specific productions of his own — whether they be letters, or stories, or sermons, or any other kind of written prose — the maximum of meaning and of interest possible

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in any given case. This maximum appears in a negative way as correctness; that is, as the removal of the ordinary impediments to clear and interesting discourse. In a more positive way it appears as movement; if language is progressive in structure, the prime virtue of expression in language is the most powerful movement that is consistent with clearness. Whether movement be thought of as a going from word to word, from sentence to sentence, from paragraph to paragraph; or as narrative order, or logical arrangement, or as any one of those types of progression that we shall have to examine in the following chapters, — the indispensable quality of any writing is that it shall not cease to add things to itself and to us. The more smoothly, rapidly, directly, economically, pleasureably, forcibly, weightily, humorously, as the case may be, the better; but all these fine things are really but various aspects of the movement of prose. Prose, like life, has to keep a-going.

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# CHAPTER II

## GOOD WRITING AS COMPOSITION

COMPOSITION in literature is simply the art or the act of arranging the facts to be expressed in such a way as to bring out what is important; its object is to make clear or impressive the point or effect of any piece of writing. Order is, as we have seen, fundamental to good composition; but whatever means may serve to make meaning clearer, to throw important facts into greater relief or to make them more interesting, belongs to the subject. In any event, literary composition, whether simple or intricate, depends on the structure of language: that is to say, it is essentially a method of progression, of accumulation, of piecing out idea with idea, of adding fact to fact.

This idea of progression we commonly conventionalize by saying that any piece of writing — or any form of expression, like musical composition, having to do with time — has a beginning, a middle or body, and an ending. Now facts are of very various kinds and have various relations to one another. The study of composition, or, to speak more exactly, the study of arrangement



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in composition, is therefore the study of the means by which various kinds of material may be fitted into the mold of beginning, middle, and ending.

The raw material does not usually square with this mold. The beginning of any piece of writing is an act of isolation, or sequestration, or segregation, or corralling, or rounding-up. A story-teller, for example, begins by isolating certain facts of the many that he may know or that may come into his head; of these he makes a situation. Such isolation is even more evident in the drama. But description, exposition, and argumentation also cull out facts: few writers tell us all they know, and all that even some of them know is but a tiny part of what might be said. Composition is an act of limitation or confinement. The literary process is compelled to isolate things, to snatch and carry away various small parts of the mass of facts, or to dam up little pools and lead off rivulets from the stream of events and consciousness. Or, to change the figure, both the active processes and the growing *corpus* of writing may be thought of as a great variety of outgrowths from the common stock of objects and current ideas; and these outgrowths reach more or less deeply into the unknown, just as little polyps or branch fish-lines protrude and depend from the parent coral or the main trawl to catch nourishment in unknown waters.

The beginning of a piece is the dam, the stem of the polyp, the knot of the fish-line. "In plain,

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unvarnished speech," the question of beginning comes down, in nearly all cases, to finding some point of departure. The matter is most simply illustrated in letters. What your correspondent has said offers an opening, often conventionalized into such phrases as, "In answer to your recent letter, I beg leave to say," or, more anciently, "I take my pen in hand." Where a previous letter offers no such opportunity, the point of departure may be had in various ways, — by the assumption of common interests, common friendship, mutual advantage in business, a reasonable wish for information or aid. The handy fact is seized. Hence the exceeding great joy of the weather, of politics, of the latest novel, of the Balkan war, as "openers" in talk. Again, the text from the Bible, at the head of the sermon; the skilful reference in the leader to the recent happenings in local or national politics; the graceful allusion, in the literary essay, to a story of one's childhood, to the practice of great men of letters, to opposing schools of thought, — all these are also examples of points of departure, and they assume common and often conventional interests. A student may profitably examine, from this point of view, any of the thousands of competent essays, leaders, sermons, and treatises in the English language, to see how they are yoked to the body of current ideas and interests.

Elaborated points of departure are something of a refinement in modern composition. Mon-

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taigne, Bacon, and other eminent men, did not fear to jump straight at the subject, trusting the reader to knot their discourse to the common line of thought — or not to make any connection whatever. Even as late as the nineteenth century we find Jeffrey saying of Wordsworth's *Excursion:* "This will never do!" and Macaulay, without formal preliminaries "purposing to write a history of England." Why the more suave and explicit method has tended to succeed the more robust and direct manner, — whether due, for example, to the influence of Hegel, or to our modern idea of growth and relationship, or to pressure of scientific classification, or to comparative ease in producing copy, or to Evolution, or to fear, convenience, habit, convention, or what not, — is an interesting question which this book is not concerned to elucidate.

Special forms of beginning call for a word. Thus it is not uncommon to speak of the purpose of the author and the importance of the subject, as does Mill in his tracts *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women*, as also in his *Autobiography*. It is happily less usual for writers, like Oriental dragomans, to speak of their surpassing and exclusive competence, or, assuming an attitude of modesty and astonishment, to apologize for their humble and ill-worded but well-meant efforts, or to counterfeit amazement that a perfectly plain meaning should be misunderstood. Unless a subject is really important, can

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be nailed, so to speak, to some real human need or interest, it may better be let take care of itself: it is better to make it interesting than to label it "vital, with care." Factitious interests are easy to conjure up but are seldom convincing. And in like manner it is probably best to have one's eye on the subject, to strive for suitable presentation of facts, letting modesty and competence appear as by-products.

The beginning of a piece of writing is perhaps best studied in the separate and formal introductions, by the author or by some friendly hand, which not infrequently lend grace and authority to books. Such introductions, by speaking of the subject with which the book deals, aim to show its connection with more general and common knowledge. This formal act of describing the relation of the particular book to the more general subject, may evidently be critical, or commendatory, or biographical, or anything else that the writer may think proper. Strictly speaking, these introductions are themselves complete compositions, though their function is that of a host, a middleman, or a promoter. A study of opening sentences and paragraphs is also good.

The beginnings of stories, of plays, and certain other forms of literary art would seem, at first glance, to fall without the observations that have been made. But the exceptions are more apparent than real. Good novels and dramas

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present opening situations of an unstable sort; these are the premises, or primary assumptions, and they may evidently be about any kind of thing within the range of experience. Representing a conflict of desires or prospective difficulties to be overcome, the novel and the drama develop from this exposition toward a stable situation, wading, it may be, "through slaughter to a throne." Such points of departure being knit closely into the fabric, it is very hard — as well as, usually, very academic and arbitrary — to say what is the beginning and what is the rest. In like manner, points of departure in other forms of literature — poems, epigrams, jests, etc. — may be analyzed, the objective being the way in which a piece of writing is made to connect with ideas outside itself.

From this last clause the great and by no means uncommon structural fault of introductions will be apparent. It is characteristic of many sermons, for example, that any moral could be drawn from the introduction or expanded text, or that the moral could be fitted to any introduction; so that a clever preacher with, say, ten introductions and ten morals could make one hundred sermons. If an introduction does not introduce, if it does not let the subject go into the hands of the reader naturally, it is evidently bad. A not unusual fault in amateur writing is the beginning that leaves the subject standing speechless, like strangers before an awkward

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host, or that ties up good material, or that compels a reader to beat a retreat from a structural *cul-de-sac* and essay some easier mode of entrance to an idea. Too much mention of modesty, of competence, of importance of the subject, too many flourishes at the beginning of a letter, reduce themselves to this objection; for there may be as little real connection between the possible noise of an introduction and the real importance of the subject as between the ass and the lion's skin of the fable. As in that classical instance, sensible people will not long be imposed on. This is the human side of a technical matter, — that it is unwise to promise more in an introduction than can be carried out in the text.

Since progression is, as we have seen, the inherent condition of all writing, the study of the so-called middle or development of a composition, is essentially the examination of various ways of progression and the application of whatever method seems to be most suitable for the facts and the occasion. How shall the writer arrange his ideas? That is the question. The answer obviously depends on the specific facts to be arranged, but several types of order do exist and may be analyzed.

The commonest of all these is order in time. Things happen in succession or are to be done one after another; the natural act is to arrange

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them as they occur. The method is applicable to any narrative of past events: thus there are letters of travel, Xenophon's *Anabasis*, the *Book of Chronicles*, *The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant*, *With Kitchener to Khartum*, and the news in the daily press. This is also the common method applicable to history, but the quality of specific pieces may evidently be vastly different.

The method is capable of many refinements. Events, for example, that follow each other in time may be conceived as having a causal relation also; and here it is natural for a statement of causes to precede that of the effects. Story-tellers, to-day more than in earlier times, are likely to imagine events as a series of relationships, or of situations which beget other situations, physical, mental, and spiritual; the novels of George Eliot will occur to any one as an example. So history tends to assume this form, and it is not unknown in familiar letters. It is but another way of saying that we recognize or devise a new set of facts, the facts of relationship, which we cannot afford to ignore. The more primitive form of arrangement in order of time may be imagined as any answer to the question, "What happened?" The refinements more evidently fit the questions, "Why did it happen?" or "How did it happen?" As we shall see a little later this temporal method is applicable to processes as well as to happenings.

But a great many facts do not have any such

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relation to each other in terms of time, or, if the temporal idea appears, it is incidental. Thus, a great many things of a tangible sort are related to each other by position, as, for example, the rooms of a house or the features of the field of Gettysburg. Evidently a set of drawings or a relief map is better than description for making such matters clear, though a skilful description may drive the plan home. Many ideas, however, are of such a kind that no plan can be made: all general ideas and all abstractions are of this nature, in that they can neither be definitely measured or because they are so commonly true as to be capable of illustration only in specific instances. The subject of this book, for example, does not readily lend itself to picturing, nor can we draught a plan of the present status of, say, labor unrest in England. Of such general matters diagrams are indeed sometimes made, as, humorously, in Mr. Wells's *The Food of the Gods*, or, solemnly, in Professor Moulton's *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist;* but such plans are merely suggestive. The main point is that we have to recognize large bodies of fact related by position or status, and here the essential progression of language compels a *seriatim* enumeration, more or less complete, of the various aspects of the object or the idea. As the former was called progression in order of time, so this might be called progression by enumeration.

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As with the former, so this type also is actually much modified. There are recurrent facts, and the recurrence may be in uniform order. Such is the condition of all processes, as the making of shoes, or gunpowder, or sailing on a Cunarder from New York to Liverpool. The same set of acts will be performed, with incidental differences, whether they have happened, or are now taking place, or are to be done. Typical representatives of this class of facts are cook-books, rules for tennis, parliamentary procedure, scientific formulas, descriptions of the habits of ants, of the symptoms and treatment of typhoid, the *vade-mecums* of Bradshaw, Murray, Baedecker and Company. In other words, you enumerate till the body of facts is as completely presented as you wish, but the enumeration follows a temporal order, often combined with an arrangement based on the actual juxtaposition of objects.

As with events, these enumerations may be thought of as causal or logical. The causal order of the enumerative process is easy to understand: a certain state or condition is the result of antecedent situations and conditions and will lead to further conditions, so that our progression may take the form of looking back to a previous condition or looking forward by way of prophecy. The political unrest — a status — in England and America is due to certain conditions past and present; and it will lead to different arrangements, blessed or horrible, or some-

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thing else, according to the views of the writer. In this respect the method of enumeration very largely coincides with the causal-temporal method described above, though likely to appear in prophecy as well as history and to be applied to generalizations rather than to specific facts.

Logical enumeration is not quite so easy to understand, or, at its best, quite so common, but since we hear a good deal about logic in composition, and shall hear more in Chapter IV, a word may be said regarding it. In logical enumeration, there is no necessary antecedent causal or temporal relation, though these may often be found. What happens typically is either (1) that because a particular thing or a number of particular things are true something else of a different and more general sort is also true at the same time, or (2) that because a general fact is true certain particular facts are true; and all this quite apart from actual observation of the derived facts. All of us are constantly making inferences and deductions from what we see and read. Most of these are probably pretty commonplace, as that the smoothness of the sea betokens a lack of wind, or that the rise of the thermometer suggests the need of a straw hat; or they may not correspond to the exact demands of formal logic; or the facts may be improperly applied to one another. With these matters we are not at present concerned. For the pur-

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poses of composition, we merely have to recognize the existence of a great number of things in logical relationship, rather than in temporal or tangible positions, or as steps in a process, or as conditions. These logical relationships have to be enumerated from premise to conclusion or from conclusion to premise, or from facts to inference, or from general to particular.

Doubtless other refinements and modifications suggest themselves, but it is easy to recognize these two great types of progression, — one in time, the other by the division of facts or ideas into component parts of any suitable kind and the arrangement of these parts in some order or enumeration not primarily temporal. Books like Boswell's *Johnson* and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* employ the first on a large scale; *The Origin of Species* and *The American Commonwealth* use the second. Similar methods are found even in very slight work — letters, reviews, reports, and the like. Actually the methods are not pure and exclusive, any more than are any other literary distinctions when applied to the actual writing. The first, however, is very convenient when possible, since it is perhaps a little closer to the movement of language. Both methods are commonly employed in the presentation of bodies of fact or of ideas, be they few or many, simple or complex. Thus Gibbon mainly presents us with the facts of the decline and fall, and Mr. Bryce

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corrals whatever important observations he has gathered about the American commonwealth.

There is, however, of facts and ideas another aspect which appears when the material is selected and trained toward a particular end. Keeping in mind our general types, we may say that certain facts or observations or objects or ideas may be so selected as to bear on particular ideas or feelings. Two interesting types of progression — further refinements, if you will, of the main types — may be called composition by thesis and composition by prevailing mood. So far as these methods differ from the preceding it is in this: that not all the facts in a subject or a large or small body of interesting facts are ranged one after another, until the facts as facts are sufficiently aired, but that specially selected facts are made to illustrate and enforce special ideas and modes. On the central idea the facts are, so to speak, strung in the most effective and enticing order. Let us make the distinction, so far as there is any distinction, clear. In the former main types, whatever important ideas are judged to go with a subject, be it big or little, — and always within the limits of practical publication, — may be presented by time or by division into groups; the method is accumulative. We wish to know the main facts about Johnson or the American people, or the fall of Rome, or the geography of England, or bread-making, or parliamentary debate, or French watering-places,

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of what is going on in the world to-day. We do not for the time being call for special interpretation of these facts. The facts are the main thing. But in the specialized types, the interpretation of fact becomes the main thing. The former attitude is, generally, scientific, encyclopedic, and journalistic; the latter, literary, political, theological, polemic, personal, or what not.

Composition by thesis is a very common act. It is evidently characteristic of all persuasive writing and of nearly all special writing, — of sermons, leaders, book reviews, essays, speeches, and letters of reproof, exhortation, and command. Admirable examples abound in the writings of Matthew Arnold, in Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, in the series of articles on the labor unrest appearing recently in the *Daily Mail*, in the discussions of the *Spectator*, the *Saturday Review*, and the New York *Nation*, in the works of Messrs. Wells, Shaw, Belloc, Bennett, Chesterton, and others. Thesis composition is for the writer, at least, the most entertaining of serious literary sports. Nothing is more agreeable than to have views; nothing so flattering as to think that these views have vogue. A danger arises from the exclusiveness of the method: some important bits of evidence may possibly be overlooked and the thesis may not square with all the facts obtainable. Hence writers of a scientific or judicial turn are likely to

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be shy of theses, contenting themselves with statements of fact and venturing interpretation only when the evidence points to an unmistakable conclusion. But thesis-writing, conjoined with lively expression, is a great engine for arousing and stimulating us, and we could not do without it, any more than we could do without the writers who have been named. It is quite as likely to be an imaginative as a reasoning act. The thesis may be stated as a premise or as a conclusion, or may run through the whole discourse. Structurally, the thesis is the fork or spit which toasts the facts before the fire of genius.

Composition by prevailing mood or dominant tone, or by any other name that impresses the reader as standing for a recognizable fact of composition, is common enough in description and narration. Such facts are selected from the body of objects or of happenings as will bring a certain impression to the fore. An "atmosphere," as is very frequently said, is thereby created, and the main point of the entire composition may lie simply in this atmosphere or prevailing impression, rather than in the facts themselves or in any body of ideas that a serious reader might be disposed to extract. Classical instances of this kind of composition are Poe's *Ligeia*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Masque of the Red Death*, Lamb's *The South Sea House* and *Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist*, De Quincey's *The*

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*English Mail Coach* and *Suspiria de Profundis;* but a reader may with quite as much profit turn for examples to some of the later novels of Mr. Henry James, — *In a Cage*, for example, *The Sacred Fount*, and *The Great Good Place*, — to some of the scenes in Mr. Hardy's *Tess* and *The Return of the Native*, to Turgenieff's *Annals of a Sportsman* and *Smoke*. Most works of this character cannot be reduced to a set of facts or the statement of a single thesis, and he who would that all writing should "point a moral and adorn a tale," would miss much that is very good in literature. In composition of this kind the point is diffused through the substance of the story or the picture, and cannot be had by any bare summary.

Any usefulness that the preceding analysis of types in composition may have, lies chiefly in the help that it may afford in determining questions of goodness and badness. Compositions may be good or bad, still standing under any one of these loosely separated types; but questions of quality are more satisfactorily settled if the general kind of composition, that is, its purpose and its facts, is recognized. Before entering upon this discussion, however, it will further matters to look for a moment at the process of composition as (1) a matter of classification of facts, and (2) as the ensuing arrangement of groups or divisions in the most effective order. Broadly, composition is nothing more or less than this.

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Classification and division are somewhat formidable words, and the notion is somehow prevalent that they are the property of science and logic, that to classify is an act of extreme intellectual skill of which the ordinary man should be shy. Doubtless it can be made so; but it is more reasonable to regard classification and logic as among the very common acts or things of the universe, which we cannot avoid any more than we can avoid sleepiness or hunger. For example, the simple direction that we give an errant stranger, "walk that way for three blocks and then take the cross-town car," simply classifies and groups several prospective acts. Thus railway time-tables, guide-books, recipes, theater programs, our daily routine, and almost every familiar thing, are built on and may appear to us as the classification of certain kinds of phenomena. If you turn to the essays and novels cited in the foregoing pages you will find that each is built upon some scheme of classification, and that ensuing groups of facts, ideas, opinions, notions, imaginings, and impressions result. Composition is essentially classification, and the resulting groups may be arranged in order of time, or by juxtaposition, or in about any way that seems good. If any doubt lingers as to the pervasiveness of classification in all literature, the obvious fact may be reinforced by the authority of no less a man than Plato, who in the *Phædrus* causes Socrates to say by

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way of his last word on the subject (Jowett's translation):

"Until a man knows the truth of the several particulars of which he is writing or speaking, and is able to define them as they are, and having defined them again to divide them until they can be no longer divided, and until in like manner he is able to discern the nature of the soul, and discover the different modes of discourse which are adapted to different natures, and to arrange and dispose them in such a way that the simple form of speech may be addressed to the simpler nature, and the complex and composite to the more complex nature — until he has accomplished all this, he will be unable to handle arguments according to the rules of art, as far as their nature allows them to be subjected to art, either for the purpose of teaching or persuading; — such is the view which is implied in the whole preceding argument."

That classification at once suggests science and logic is probably for the reason that here, as often elsewhere, a common human act is appropriated, elaborated, and formalized to meet specifically exact needs; but there were kings before Agamemnon. The logical requirements of classification are (1) that the resulting divisions should embrace all the facts to be presented; (2) that the dividing should be made from one point of view until all the facts have been contained; and (3) that the groups should be mu-

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tually exclusive. Doubtless these three rules were desirable in all matters, but, in actual relations, only the first can be applied with any strictness; this rule means, in practice, that you should say all that you think necessary to say on the subject. Even in science, too great an insistence on these rules sets students by the ears over profitless questions, as whether a particular object is a species or a variety — a matter ordinarily of no interest to the object, unless he is being tried for some degree of murder, and usually of very little benefit to mankind. In less formal matters, that is, in our more usual daily, intellectual, and literary concerns, we rarely use logical rules, or, to put the matter differently, (1) we use as many facts or ideas as we have or can think of or as are necessary to our purpose; (2) we do not by any means group our facts from one constant point of view, but consciously or unconsciously shift our ground as we see fit, such flitting being not infrequently the life of discourse; and (3) we cannot make the divisions mutually exclusive if we would. In simpler words, we classify as much as is necessary for our purposes and from the point of view that fits the point of departure. If, for example, a man should ask me about football, I should be at a loss to answer until I could guess or ask his purpose. If he wished to know all about the game, I should probably refer him to an encyclopedia of sport, or to a book of rules, or to

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some erudite person like Mr. Walter Camp or Major Philip Trevor. If, having a son in mind, he wished to know of the dangers, my facts would at once be limited. If he wished my advice on the game as a spectacle, I should probably reply that it is very popular, and hence might be thought interesting; but that in my own opinion no more stupid sight, unless it be cricket or bull-fighting, has been devised for the amusement of men. A great many other answers could be made, but in all cases the division would depend on the purpose. One has merely to try to classify games, or poems, or travel routes, or ordinary food and clothing, to see at once how common is classification and how difficult is any comprehensive handling of the matter and how dependent on the immediate purpose is any grouping of facts. Scientific classification is simply more accurate, comprehensive, and profound than our ordinary use of the great device.

Classification is most readily seen in the conventional divisions into which a piece of writing of any length is ordinarily split. These units of composition, as they may be called, are the sentence and the paragraph (so common and so important that special study will later be given to them); the section, usually made up of several paragraphs; the chapter, often a matter of several sections; the book or part, composed of several chapters; parts, in turn, may make up the whole treatise. Not all books have all these

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units; they are more common in expository work than in narrative fiction, but novelists like George Eliot and Mrs. Ward use them. It would probably be more accurate to conceive the arrangement of material the other way round: first by books, which divide into parts, chapters, sections, paragraphs, and sentences, of which the last is the most necessary. Much writing does not get beyond the paragraph stage. If now we revert to our earlier analysis of progression, we shall see that the act of composition is the breaking of material into groups and sub-groups, roughly represented by these units arranged in order.

We are now in a better position to consider goodness and badness in composition. Generally we may say that whatever arrangement of the units of composition best accords with the actual relation of the facts to one another has the better chances of success; which is but another way of recommending straightforward style. The matter will, however, be clearer if we revert for a moment to the so-called principles of composition, unity, coherence, and emphasis. Unity is no abstract principle; it is rather knowing in any particular instance, be it large or small, what you wish to say, knowing what each book, part, chapter, section, and paragraph is to be about, what body of facts is to be conveyed in each; and it consists also in making these matters clear to the reader. This conception of unity is important; for latterly, in our eager pressing

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after the rules of art, unity is sometimes talked of as if it were something to be isolated from the specific facts, or as if it were the special property of certain literary forms, of which the short story is now-a-days engaged in staking out a very large claim. Unity is indeed more apparent in a closely drawn thesis or a well-knit tale than in many a longer work, but that may be merely because the shorter pieces may be more compact, as they are certainly easier to grasp as a whole. It is idle and academic, however, to deny unity to longer pieces, say Boswell's *Johnson*, *The Origin of Species*, *The American Commonwealth*, *Middlemarch*, *Vanity Fair*, in so far as we can see what they are driving at and can recognize the bearing of details. Doubtless other writers, treating the same or other subjects, would have given us other facts, but so long as the conception is clear there is unity. Unity, therefore, — to speak figuratively, — abhors irrelevancy and heterogeneity, and if it has no such violent objection to digressions, it insists that they shall be known for what they are, and that they should perhaps not be so numerous or so lengthy as to obscure the progression of prose. If one is so disposed he might debate the question as to the unity of, say, Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*, Berkeley's *Siris*, or Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.

This is the negative side. More positively, unity may be thought of as an effort at concen-

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tration and intensity. In this aspect it becomes specially important in the selective types of composition spoken of a few paragraphs back. That is to say, one not only knows his mind, but is as short and as much to the point as he can be; everything that is not a positive help is cut out. This conception of unity reached height in the venerable and still recrudescent conception of the famous "three unities" of the drama, the unities of time, place, and action. Mr. Strachey has a good word to say on this subject (*Landmarks in French Literature*, pp. 94–95), the gist of which, for our purposes, is that "Their true importance lies simply in their being a powerful means towards concentration. Thus it is clear that in an absolute sense they are neither good nor bad; their goodness or badness depends upon the kind of result which the dramatist is aiming at." That is to say, with reference to other literary forms besides the drama, whereas unity is first making clear what you are writing about, it is also a positive and deliberate restriction of what one has to say to a very special purpose. If in this restriction formal rules are a help, they should by no means be eschewed, but to make Median and Persian laws of them is manifestly absurd. Habit is, of course, the great counsellor, and hence a practised letter-writer, for example, not only knows his own mind and his own impressions, but is also likely to bear clearly on these things. For discourse

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may have unity and yet may be inclined to sprawl, whereas concentration is a positive safeguard against irrelevance.

A good deal is sometimes said about what is called "unity of impression," or, from another point of view, "unity of tone." Unity of impression means about the same thing as prevailing mood: material is so rendered as to produce a uniform and constant effect. From the reader's point of view unity of impression is a pretty variable thing: the reader with the greater powers of mental and physical endurance, — with the greater command over sitting still, in short, — is likely to attribute unity of impression to longer pieces than does the less robust reader; and anybody will find more unity in what interests than in what bores him. Much of our current literature is based on this conception of unity, and especially do we find short stories and magazine articles conventionally calculated to occupy the idle half-hour of the railway trip or the post-prandial repose. That many admirable articles answer this call of civilization does not necessarily alter this conception of the physical basis of unity of impression. One may reasonably quarrel, however, with any such notion as the not uncommon one, that because unity of impression is more evident in such short pieces, they do therefore represent a higher form of art than longer treatises and three-volume novels.

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Unity of tone is not unlike unity of impression, but it means the presence and persistence in any writing of a "dominant note," as of joy, or disaster, or impending misfortune, or cheerfulness, or humor, or "pervasive melancholy." It is sometimes held to be inartistic for a piece of writing to end differently from its opening premises, just as it is assuredly wrong to go beyond one's word or one's evidence in logical and practical matters. Thus tragedy calls for such situations as render tragedy possible, and prefers not to shift from comedy to disaster without the presaging of misfortune: the hero should not be wounded and the villain should not "get off with the swag," unless the antecedent situations are such as to put the former in jeopardy and the latter to be on the watch for alien and detachable property. Stevenson had a good deal to say about beginning a story as it is to be ended, and his better novels, like *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, and *The Master of Ballantræ*, are good illustrations of the principle. But the principle is as broadly useful as artistic. A newspaper article is always tragic, or "newsful," or joyful, or what not, from the very first headline which announces "Horrible Disaster," or "Favorite Beaten," or "Great Democratic Landslide." A leader may be uniformly contemptuous or laudatory in tone aside from the facts to be specifically presented. Or again, we often note a very carefully cultivated uniformity of

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tone among certain classes of people, as lawyers, soldiers, university men, possibly more common in older than in more recently established civilizations. Unity of tone is a widely used human engine rather than a special adjunct in literary composition. It is largely a matter of style, of which more later, and, in this sense, is the result of certain specific expressions.

Doubtless other kinds of unity, in addition to the three classic unities, and to the others named above, might be found or will be sometimes defined; for it seems to be a common human pastime to seek artistic reasons for doing as one likes. Practically, however, the best way to gain unity is not to think about it, but to think of a subject till you know what you think and wish to say about it; and having done thus, to adopt as uniform a basis of treatment as may be, with due regard to the frailty of the reader. If it be handy to tie oneself to the apron-strings of formal partition, — a practice not disdained by Mill, Macaulay, and many other clear writers, — by all means do so. The only general rule is that nothing should be despised that tends to clarity, unless truth is thereby sacrificed or the reader be bored with too much movement of the wheels.

Coherence in composition means order, nothing more and nothing less. Granted that you know your mind, know what you wish to say; coherence is simply the dividing of the material

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into groups and the treatment of the groups one after another in the best specific order that can be found for those specific facts. Coherence is, therefore, but another way of saying that the facts in a piece of writing must be intelligibly classified. They may follow one another according to any of the plans that have been spoken of, — time, cause, juxtaposition, logic, etc., — by any method that accords with the relationship of the facts that the writer wishes to bring out. The test of coherence is that the reader understands this relationship, that he can, in short, see where each fact goes.

Hence coherence depends in many ways on the intelligence of the reader, and it is quite useless to attempt to establish rules for literary order. The main thing is that writing should go from some point to some point, and that the bearing of the details should be clear. To be sure, we do but conform to a natural plan when in dealing with certain events we follow the order of time, and certain forms of literature, as the sonnet or the five-act play, have, through long experience, become highly conventionalized; so that one has to do little more, material and genius apart, than to place his ideas in a carefully prepared envelope. But any attempt to say that a writer should proceed from general to particular, or from principle to illustration, or from simple to complex, is likely to be futile; for in any given case the better practice, where not prescribed by

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customary forms, may be to reverse these arrangements. In literary structure many things are natural and logical, or handy and conventional, but few are inevitable or ideal.

Coherence is probably best understood by the examination of actual pieces of good arrangement and of specific literary devices that have been used to promote it. We need not now dwell on those temporal relations of fact to fact which are illustrated in elaborate historical compositions, on the one hand, or, on the other, in those humbler items, such as the story of the survivor or the classical case of Wragg (see Arnold's *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*). Mill, Newman, Arnold, Huxley, and William James, for example, are prose writers of very high quality; others may be as lucid, as coherent; but it does not really matter whom, within certain limits, one selects for illustration. Now these writers gain coherence in no one way; they differ from one another, and the different writings of each need not necessarily follow any one formula. Mill's famous essay *On Liberty* is the statement of a principle of action, supported by argument, and applied to, rather than illustrated by, specific instances of the infringement of the principle; his *Autobiography*, which might be called narrative or exposition, is a statement of his successive occupations and achievements, and of the educative influences which were at work at the various stages of his career. New-

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man's *Idea of a University*, particularly in separate chapters, is a series of progressions and of developments, whether by agreement or animadversion, from one position to a slightly more advanced position, until from a simple statement or antithesis he has arrived at a glowing conclusion, which has quite carried him away, often from the facts of the case; his *Apologia* is an explanation of his spiritual equipment and his doctrinal changes, presented in stages, much as is Mill's *Autobiography*, but presented in a much more controversial tone than the latter book. Arnold, in *Celtic Literature*, as frequently elsewhere, proceeds by a series of exclusions to find the thread of the "real" thing, to winnow the grain of Arnoldian truth from the chaff of common or learned misconception; in his essay on Gray he attempts, with a palpable disregard of strict logical possibilities, to find the explanation of an alleged fact — the "real" reason why Gray "never spoke out" was that he "fell on an age of prose." Huxley, a master of expository method, may, as in *A Piece of Chalk*, describe a simple phenomenon in its common aspect, and then, by examining it from other points of view and with other instruments, elucidate new facts, which finally frame a general idea of the making of the world; or he may, as in his lectures on Evolution, having stated three actual and historical hypotheses regarding the origin of things, proceed to examine these hypotheses in the light of

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the evidence. James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is a grouping and an illustration of various differing facts of conversion and of types of temperament, and such things; his *Human Immortality* analyzes certain currently recognized and possible functions of the human mind, and argues in behalf of open-mindedness in the examination of these aspects of the matter. The reader will at once remark that these differences in method are really differences in fact, that James's method in *Human Immortality* is the outcome of his open-mindedness, his harboring of all suggestions; just as Arnold's exclusiveness, as in *Gray*, results from a too constant desire to assert the claims of the "real," to the possible banishment of other equally good things. But the answer is evident: in dealing with coherence, you cannot get away from a man's quality or his facts; his literary ways depend on these. Consequently original writers not only give us new ideas, they also give us new ways of treating and arranging ideas; consider the immense influence of Mill, Darwin, and James from this point of view. The venerable "first, second, third" of the preacher, to take another instance, is sometimes looked upon with distrust because it assumes an order that may be merely arbitrary. That method has often still to be used, especially in enumeration, however it may be disguised; but as we become better acquainted with the order of things in

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the world, or of our business, or of the wishes of our correspondents, we are likely to adopt something approximating to that order. The best method of studying coherence is really to examine good writers, who are many, and, on the whole, to examine modern writers. The time when one "must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison," or Burke, or De Quincey, or Coleridge, or other classic, exclusively, has happily passed. This is but natural, since their ideas have given place to new interests, new conceptions, new ideas; and hence to new structure. It is obviously an act of bad faith to the modern conception of organic evolution to assume that good modern writers may not have profited, directly or indirectly, by what their predecessors had to say. It is indeed a grave literary and pedagogical fallacy to assume, as is sometimes done, that good moderns have nothing to tell us about composition that could not better be found in the ancients, from any point of view, whether of style or of structure.

Doubtless a considerable book could be written on the history of rhetorical devices for gaining coherence and on the history of thought as expressed in literary structure; we should have a branch of the science of semantics, described by Mr. Pearsall Smith in *The English Language* (p. 126). But the object of the preceding paragraph is to insist on the fact that we are dealing with an actual instrument of order rather than

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the development of that instrument. As a matter of fact, no sensible critic would dream of censuring the order of any production in any *genre* on the ground that it did not conform to the practice of certain standard writers. The critic and the reader alike would blame the composition primarily because the facts were wrong, and, secondarily, because the ideas and their bearing on one another were obscure, or because there might be a better arrangement. Obviously any knowledge of facts or skill in composition would be brought to bear on this matter, but these would be a matter of tact rather than of authority. Coherence, in fine, is clear arrangement, for which specific rules may rarely be given. The best method of study is the examination of coherent writers, of all ages and assuredly of our own times, to see how they handle their facts, ideas, illustrations, digressions, exceptions, qualifications, etc., and in this regard the reasonable aid of advice, of sketches, abstracts, contents, briefs, formal partitions, is to be courted.

Emphasis in composition is but another way of saying that important ideas shall be given important treatment. Emphasis is, therefore, largely a matter of device, and the most natural device is to say that certain things are more important than others, as is done by judges in charging juries. Other common methods are to be seen in the somewhat mechanical use of headlines in newspapers, in the "display" of

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text-books, in classified and subdivided tables of contents, in the "featuring" of the dramatic star in the program. All these rest on the fact that the eye is more quickly caught by emblazonment and iteration than by simple statement. Hence we often find emphasis pressed to sensationalism, and reiteration to the limits of weariness and nagging. Literary devices for emphasis are such things as illustration and example, contrast, suspense, climax, selection, antithesis, hyperbole, irony. Some of these are cheap, or annoying, or detestable, or offensive to taste. But any fundamental objection to bad emphasis lies in its distortion of facts for the sake of sensationalism or effect. Thus modern English criticism finds some fault with Macaulay's "stamping emphasis," and the censure comes down to the allegation that he distorted fact and judgment in the interests of contrast. Thus paradoxical writers paint the past and the present *ultra-ego* — or, more exactly, the *infra-ego* — as wrong, in order to give their own ideas and reactions sublimer relief. Though it is, in any event, a great pity to waste harmless wood-pulp on huge headlines, it is also quite possible for a newspaper that eschews these methods to perpetuate tumult and shouting and all the vices that go with intellectual noise. On the whole, provided a writer does not go beyond what he can truthfully say, little serious damage will come of using literary and mechanical devices.

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Here again the best method is to examine the works of good modern writers.

Theoretically, it would seem best, when we have had our say, to stop. Practically, to do this is not so easy; for certain formalities, or refinements, or necessities of the subject call for more consequential treatment. Instead of saying "The End," we run down by inference. Running down is always a slow process after one is well wound up. The volume of words used by inexperienced or by habitual speakers and writers may have no relation to the number of ideas. Endings are commonly thought to be the hardest part of composition. In general, they may be said to depend on what has gone before, —*finis ab origine pendet* is the classical warrant for this assertion, —and this fact of dependency expresses itself in a variety of types of closure. The most conventional, those of letters, need not detain us. For convenience, we may think of endings as static, as logical or conclusive, and as formal or stylistic.

Static endings are best seen in compositions moving in time order. Events or processes have arrived at a certain point. Thus the bread recipe tells us to "bake in a hot oven one hour and lay aside to cool before eating." Thus novel and dramatic endings arrive through a series of unstable situations, to a point where we may leave the scene in joy or sadness, knowing

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that the lovers have been parted forever, that the feud has been reconciled, that the good people have had blessings bestowed upon them and that the bad people are in jail, that the hid treasure has been recovered, that the chief character has made an ass of himself. Thus Rome is conceived as having finally fallen, "its huge bulk stretched along the ground," and the Middle Ages as having made a formal exit, and History as having fully dawned, and the Renaissance as having turned up its toes and being laid out for decent burial. Rome, or the Middle Ages, or History, or the Renaissance, in any one of these interesting positions, may be the subject for picturing, or for reflection, or for moralizing, before life begins anew in some other book or some other part of the world. In all these instances the ending selects, from the vast variety of actual happenings, the facts of restfulness and achievement. The horse is tied to the hitching-post, the rider has dismounted; he no longer heeds the passing of other wayfarers. The method blossoms at its prettiest in our fine sentimental novels; the more modern works of fiction and fact are inclined to cut down the exposition of status to the lowest limits of epigram or fact.

Logical endings naturally present themselves as conclusions from antecedent facts. They are best seen in argument, where a statement of the evidence and a train of reasoning is followed

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by certain formal deductions or formal generalizations. Legal procedure furnishes a good example, because a trial may be conceived as a complete composition: witnesses give evidence, lawyers reason about that evidence, judge and jury find on that evidence. But the endings of novels, dramas, and other imaginative works are frequently conceived in logical or causal terms. Thus the important person in *The Mill on the Floss*, or in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, or *The Ebb Tide*, is predoomed to failure, because unfit for her environment, or by reason of a more powerful, capricious, and exterminating fate, or through his plain lack of character. This kind of ending is sometimes called "inevitable," and the devising of it is counted one of the great triumphs of modern narrative method. Life is conceived of in more sequential terms than in earlier fiction; doubtless the novelist would have everything turn out well, but he is bound to his last of serious interpretation and cannot go beyond it.

Evidently in conclusive endings, and, to some degree, in static endings it is important that one should not go beyond the facts or the probabilities. Examples of statement totally unwarranted by preceding evidence are, however, frequent enough in composition of the logical type. Such conclusions may arise out of the notion that since convention calls for some kind of dignified exit, positive endings to all subjects are as inevi-

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table as death. But one should always bear in mind that from many bodies of interesting fact no sound conclusion can be drawn, nor can an inquirer always find the theory or the generalization that he went out to seek. Therefore if we must have conclusions, — and we all feel the immense pressure we are always under to squeeze out something positive, to exude "It is so's," as the silkworm exudes fly-leaders and silk, — the safest course is to cut out all facts that do not point the way we want them to point. Such a method is, as has been said, not infrequently the method of thesis composition. One might almost say that the real conclusiveness is in inverse proportion to its length: *The Origin of Species*, for example, is considerably more tentative and less rhetorically conclusive than a leader in, say, *The Standard*, or the New York *Evening Post*, — yet the former has had quite as much effect in the long run.

The same principles apply to endings in imaginative literature. Any great going beyond the situations that have been premised or, in realistic novels, the plausibilities of common life, tends to melodrama. Good melodrama is surely a very delightful thing, but it does not belong to the province of the "inevitable." In narration, as in argumentation and exposition — though to no such exacting degree — it is probably reasonable to make logical conclusions a little less round than one would like, to allow

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something, in short, to chance, or to the possibility of error. Moderation and restraint are good to cultivate.

The place of these logical endings would seem to be at the end. Just as at the beginning of a piece of writing it is well to put oneself in the hands of formal partition, or statement of purpose and plan, so an ending may not inconveniently be preceded by a formal summary of what has gone before. Such a summary is really a very good test of the order of a piece; if you cannot summarize the main points of your argument, the reader also may miss them; the structure is probably wretched. Such summary is especially useful when, as often with inexperienced writers, the conclusion has been allowed to leak out at all points, until nothing is left but flat and impotent repetition. In a very different way, of course, this diffused conclusion, as it may be called, is often seen in newspaper editorials; the conclusion is also the thunder that reverberates from paragraph to paragraph throughout the discourse, and the dispensing of this fulmination requires an experienced and Jovian hand. Novels, again, under the term unity of tone do often illustrate this diffusion.

Whereas it is desirable that logical endings should not go beyond the facts, either in deduction or in prophecy, the reverse is likely to be true in formal or stylistic endings, — as when you may call a man a liar, signing the letter

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"faithfully yours." Stylistic endings probably arise from a desire to be rather more formal, or enthusiastic, or suggestive, or persuasive, than is strictly in accord with fact and logic. Or they may result from a writer's being bewitched by his own eloquence, or from his skilful seizure of an opportunity to impress his readers, in whom he has already developed sympathy. Stylistic endings are very common in all literature of all kinds, poetical and prosaic. Thus Milton may be thought to have written his sonnet to the line "They also serve who only stand and wait." Thus:

> "The soul of Adonais, like a star,
> Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are."

Thus Marc Antony succeeds in crying havoc and in letting slip the dogs of war. Thus Newman is likely to close each section of a chapter in a higher key than the preceding. Thus Ruskin abounds in bursts of alliteration and eloquence. Thus the conclusions of newspaper editorials are redolent of general praise or blame of the government: whatever the specific occasion, *Delenda est Carthago*. Thus Mr. Bryce, a clear observer of facts, closes many chapters of the *American Commonwealth* with a metaphor about vehicles traversing roads or some other figurative suggestion of the main point. Thus Mr. Bryan has mankind "crucified on a cross of gold." Thus in general we try to do pretty and per-

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suasive things, and they are justified less by being literary devices than by standing for some real enthusiasm and belief.

Such are the chief general facts about composition; some special applications will be made in the following chapters. In closing this chapter, it may be well to repeat the remark that the best way of studying composition is to examine various actual compositions of good quality and different kinds. In any kind of writing, this study may best be carried on by isolating the beginning and the ending of a piece of work, — so far as this can be done at all, — in order to see how the author has got from one to the other. That is, of course, after one has read for profit or for pleasure.

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# CHAPTER III

## NARRATION, DESCRIPTION, AND EXPOSITION

THE general principles of composition expounded in the preceding chapter may now be more specially applied to various types of writing. Writing is classified in various ways, as into prose and verse, at one extreme, and, at the other, into that great variety of forms — novels, histories, sonnets, short stories, leaders, reviews, news items, sermons, essays, speeches, etc., — which do but name common occasions. For our present purposes we may, without apology, accept the ordinary rhetorical classes of narration, description, exposition, and argumentation as covering the whole field. The distinctions between these forms of discourse cannot be precisely stated. Practically, it is unimportant to do so, since these forms do not exist in a pure state, but merely represent general tendencies, and are crossing one another at all points. Popularly, too, we usually know that novels, books of travel, histories, newspaper items, are likely to be narration, or to contain a good deal of narrative; that society news, "lost" notices, advertisements, are likely to be



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descriptive; that cook-books, guide-books, treatises, many essays, are to a great degree expository; that sermons, editorial articles, controversial articles, debates, "committees of the whole," are pretty sure to contain a good deal of argumentation. If the point may be pressed into a single sentence, we might say that each of these forms stands for a general kind of facts — facts of past action, facts of past or present appearance, facts of constant status, and facts derived by comparison of other facts. These catch-terms are evidently used with much looseness: but what is meant will become clear as we proceed.

The kind of composition, or the devices of writing which may be used in dealing with these various kinds of facts, is what we are concerned with. Of these methods it may be remarked that new facts or new conceptions of fact do engender new methods of composition; this we have seen in the preceding chapter, where it was said that new notions of the relation of events have given rise to better knit narrative. Or again, the not uncommon modern device of dwelling on sensations and moods may call for more analytical and detailed description than when Homer was content to label waves "milk white." We have further, and always, to bear in mind that the object of any literary method is presumably to make material clearer or more interesting to the reader, whether for ideal

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or for practical purposes. One may revert to old anecdotes, or revert again and again to his symptoms and feelings, or may reiterate the fact that two and two make four, or may argue the proposition that Italians are fond of macaroni, — all in perfect structure, — but, unless one makes up for old matter by charm of style or manages to suggest something of greater importance than the mere old facts, he will bore his readers, — practically his composition will be bad. In other words, and on the whole, we may say, considering the matter in the interests of the reader, that narration deals with the unfamiliar, description with the unseen or the unfelt, exposition with the unknown, and argumentation with the unbelieved, or, in persuasion and exhortation, with the undone. That is to say, reverting to the distinctions of the preceding paragraph, narration is engaged in salting down what has happened or is imagined to have happened, and is primarily engaged in looking for new events to salt down; description is continually adding to the *corpus* of recorded appearance; exposition is striving to place new ideas, concepts, inventions, etc., in the cold storage of reality; argumentation is always busy with finding new and recasting old judgments. One may peruse the old record to his heart's content; but these forms, considered as active human process, as part and parcel of our mental life, are as has been explained. Loosely

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as these antitheses are used, the tendencies that they represent have to be taken into consideration in the following account of structure.

It is not very important for our purposes to note that NARRATION is usually classified as fact — history, biography, etc., — and fiction — novels, stories, etc., — dealing with imaginary events; nor the further conception of fiction as realistic, in so far as it is based on actual life, or idealistic or romantic, when it attempts to substitute beautiful conceptions and general views for happenings of a more humdrum and particular sort. Narratives exist in all forms and varieties and do a great many things. What is common to them all is the fact that they deal with particular things, and that they represent these things as moving from one point in time to another point in time; and also, that in doing this, they make use of action or events, actors or characters, and setting or place. It would be more accurate to say that when you have a literary record of such elements, you have what is called narrative. These elements may be very briefly indicated, as in short items; they may be stocks and stones; the interactions of one upon another may be very intricate; but all will be found in one form or another.

Now the general course of that movement from one point to another is, in fiction, called

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plot, but the term could also be applied to fact narrative. Some one has said that only about half a dozen plots can be found in literature. The remark, whether anybody ever said it or not, is in some respects true. A novel proceeds from a situation, through a series of situations, to a final state of rest: in general, all that can happen is that people in various relations and spheres have various things happen to them, or do various things, or get their characters tarnished or brightened up, in a variety of ways. So in history, men, from a condition represented as more or less stable, may grow restive, as a community or in spots, may feel the pressure of drought or of ambition, may change their rulers or their form of government, or may be overwhelmed by the Huns or the Ostrogoths or with yearning for their neighbor's cattle; and during all this may have moments of elation, misery, glory, privation, sorrow. So with biography and autobiography; a man must have done something to have it written. So in a news item somebody does something out of the ordinary, and something out of the ordinary happens to him: he is sent to jail, or crushed by the automobile, or takes refuge in foreign lands, or, being in fine fettle, makes a century or a field-goal. The general course of events in narration is not great. It is merely the process of setting up a series of situations that are unstable in that they compel the actors to move on to some-

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thing else, or that are so uncommon that the reader wishes to know what they lead to. But when it comes to filling out the formula with specific fact, the product is legion and various.

Movement, that very important thing in all narration, may not unreasonably be thought of under the figure of feeding in material to a plot, to the end that a good product may result, just as wire is fed into a machine and emerges in the form of nails. The figure would probably be more suggestive if we could turn it the other way round, imagining the machine to convert scraps into smooth and polished steel wire. In any event, the success of narrative movement depends on what is fed into the machine and how it is fed in. According to one's purpose, one may amass adventures, or collect character, or scenery, of all sorts and kinds. An objection not infrequently urged by modern critics against the narrative method of earlier novelists (see, for example, Mr. W. D. Howells's *Criticism and Fiction*) is that they used foreign matter with too open a hand, — that Thackeray, say, clogged his discourse with too many side remarks; that Scott threw in large lumps of scenery, or description of antiquities, or what not; that the digressions and sub-stories in Cervantes, Fielding, Dickens, and other men of note, flatly stop the narrative machine, interrupting alike the flow of the writer's imagination and the attention of the reader. When we speak of novels of adven-

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ture, of character, of dramatic movement, — whatever these terms be worth, — we do but contemplate an alleged general difference in kinds of material. When we object to irrelevance, to digressions, to tediousness, to heaviness, to shallowness, in stories, we are merely saying that wrong or worthless things are fed into the machine. If one may indulge in a trifling fancy, in these days when minute speculation on differences in literary form is a prevailing pastime, one might offer for what it is worth the suggestion that the real difference between the short story and the novel is that, in the former, all the ingredients are placed in the hopper at once; the machine is then turned on and stopped when the hopper is empty. In the novel, new stuff is thrown in from time to time, at random or according to a scheme, until the author has projected his eighty thousand words or his three volumes.

The study of narrative structure is, therefore, essentially the study of aids to movement, whether for the sake of the material or of the reader. In the realm of reality, what is put in depends on what there is to put in, on the facts of historical or personal record. They are made to move in time and also, in many modern instances, as a series of relations. In fiction, the material may be about what one pleases, — within the restrictions of dullness, flatness, obviousness, and impropriety, — but the chain of events must

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be kept running through the block of verisimilitude. The principle is recognized by all novelists. Trollope, for example, tells us in his *Autobiography* that his chief concern was to keep his story going. Stevenson, presumably on the same principle, disperses his descriptions lightly through his pages whenever need arises, not introducing them in any lengthy and formal manner; there is less danger that they may become dull or be regarded as irrelevant. The constant introduction of new things or of new developments from old situations is the material side of the matter. The application of the so-called principles of composition is here obvious: unity means a careful selection of material and the removal of all husks that would clog movement; coherence, an arrangement of plot with as few hitches as possible; emphasis, the elevating of important and the slighting of irrelevant matter. Of literary devices, suspense merely means a holding back of the movement that its course may be more torrential; climax, that movement progresses to a culminating point.

The point of certain literary practices appears clearly in this light. Stories may be told in the first person or in the third person. If in the first person, they may be done by many persons or by one person. A story told by many people is likely to be tedious because of shifts and interruptions and the fact that it is likely to be tedious with repetitions, even if the characters are varied.

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Hence novels in the form of letters are not now much in vogue; and readers are likely, as were the Mona Lisa eyelids, to be "a little weary" before coming to the last of, say, the twelve versions of the same plot in *The Ring and the Book*. Where the narrator is one person, as in *Lorna Doone*, *Esmond*, or *David Copperfield*, there is better chance for unity of fact and unity of tone, in that whatever happens happens to one person or is told as seen or heard by him. But characters are often very prolix, and the writer often has to exercise much restraint to protect his movement from maundering. A gifted mind may give his movement real momentum by the introduction of weighty observations, but, of course, there is always danger of twaddle. The third person method obviously gives the writer a much freer hand to make such shifts as are necessary to keep the progress alive, and if, in this act, he can also manage to introduce his material from one point of view, a fine piece of structure may readily result. Examples of fine narrative structure and movement are much commoner in French than in English literature, but, in the latter, instances of movement, not necessarily swift, but always steady, are perhaps best to be had in such novels as *Pride and Prejudice* or in the works of Mr. Henry James. The simple formula for these novels of easiest movement is that the plot is carried through by the medium and from the point of view of the chief

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character, who is, however, restrained from speaking his mind on quite so many subjects as his living counterpart might have done.

There are many other kinds of interesting movement in narration. Scott, for example, often pushed his narrative through a series of scenes, often, as in *Ivanhoe*, gathered into large overlapping groups; or again, as in the disposal of Rebecca, Rowena, and Isaac of York at Torquilstone, representing three simultaneous happenings in three successive chapters all closed by the winding of Locksley's horn outside the castle. Mr. Thomas Hardy, too, has a fine eye for scenic structure, but his scenes rarely overlap, and his novels progress by a series of brilliant leaps. The same method is pursued by Mr. Wells, that interesting novelist, who maps his progress into books, chapters, and sections, — grouping, under the larger units, narrative events of a prevailing kind, each of which is treated in brilliant detail, and is united with its fellows by a slender thread of general development. Kingsley was fond of conceiving the structure of his events as a series of stages, each of which, leading in turn to spiritual bankruptcy, brought out the conclusion, as in *Alton Locke*, that happiness is not of this world. Stevenson, as in *Kidnapped*, often caused his hero to reel through a series of situations, "o'erleaping himself and falling on the other," until sufficient experience enabled him to regain his equi-

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librium. Of fact narrative one may not say so much, since the object of history and biography and books of travel is to give the facts; but here, too, different conceptions of the relative importance and of the interpretation of fact, as well as of the detail with which events are to be treated, result in various differences. The really important point of study in all narrative composition, — considered as a matter of structure, — is to note the methods and the steps by which a novelist or historian or traveler or letter-writer progresses from an opening situation to a closing status.

In like manner the study of structure in DESCRIPTION is a study of the schemes for making clearer the appearance of things. Description may deal with any objects, whether these are presented to organs of sense or whether there be included in the term the various particular personal emotions and states of mind to which objects, acts, and ideas may give rise. Thus an advertisement of a lost brooch, and Keats's sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*, and the digestive distress of that Mr. Polly whose history is so sympathetically written by Mr. Wells, may all be regarded as description. Further it should be remarked that description is, actually, for the most part, incidental to other kinds of composition, as narration and argument, where it makes a scene more vivid or helps to

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enforce a point and localize a situation. It is often, however, self-contained, as in "wanted" advertisements. Typically, then, description, in conforming to the essentially progressive and accumulative nature of language, has to enumerate a series of objects or accompaniments until the reader is made aware of what the main fact looks like or feels like, — which main fact evidently depends upon the writer's purpose in producing the description.

In its simplest form, then, the method of description is nothing but the enumeration of certain details that go to make up an object. Such enumeration may evidently seize everything in sight, but practically every description serves a much more special purpose, and is likely to select only salient features. Thus the description of a malefactor or of a peaceable person or of a class of goods, is likely to deal with individual particulars, and such description, supplemented when possible by pictures, is what we find in "rogues' galleries," in passports, architect's specifications, and in the enticements of the bargain sale. More artistically, as is said, we find enumerative description attempting to combine individual with representative pictures; thus Scott, in the opening chapters of *Ivanhoe* and the *Talisman*, presents formal and representative scenes and groups of people. Thus the particular advertisement may be typical of the "renown and integrity" for which the house has always

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stood. In any event, the essence of this method of description is the singling out, from masses of what might be seen and said, the more striking and apposite characteristics. The method is analytical.

When it comes to putting the various selected characteristics together, method and order have a good deal to do with the result. The simplest method may be to go from position to position — from head to foot or from foot to head, from west to east or from east to west. Or, as in an architect's specifications, it may be to go from one group of like objects to another group of objects of one general class, as window sash, piping, metal work, etc. Or, again, when there is a very extensive object to be described, an object larger than can be seen from any one place, the writer may conduct the reader from place to place in the field; such is about the only possible method for describing a country (see *The American Civil War* and *Canada* in the Home University Library). Maps are doubtless much better for this kind of work than are words; but even good maps usually have to be supplemented by literary devices to give the best results. Where maps are not available and also for strictly literary purposes, the fundamental image is a great help. Thus we speak of the heel and toe of Italy, and Victor Hugo, in the classical instance, likens the field of Waterloo to the letter A. All this is simply to say that one

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classifies objects and arranges his resulting groups according to a plan that he hopes will cover the ground.

Description, however, is not all of the enumerative kind. Thus, instead of splitting an object into little pieces and playing with those that are to the purpose, we do often take refuge in very general terms, contenting ourselves with an adjective or two. *Good, pretty, fine,* may satisfy most of us in describing food, babies, and the weather, or what not; so, too, in a way that we have grown used to regarding as very fine, Homer was content with *cow-eyed, wine-dark, swift-footed,* and like epithets, or Keats speaks of *mellow fruitfulness, teeming brain, alien corn, gusty floor,* and many other now celebrated objects. The success of such epithets depends on their association or on their suggestiveness. General association is the current acceptance of a word, as when *nice,* theoretically as vague as can be, comes to stand for something intelligible when applied to people. Suggestiveness rather betokens an original and happy vigor of phrase, which is the condition of good poetry. Association probably reaches its height in the epithets of Gray's *Elegy,* though there may be some objection, on historical grounds, to this assertion. In Shakespeare we are commonly thought to find suggestiveness at its noblest. In any event happy descriptive phrases tend to become familiar and stock.

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The suggestive method of description appears not only in single words or longer phrases; it is also a method used at some length. One may, without enumerating details, manage to say a good deal about a subject. Thus one finds descriptive panegyric, like Pater's rhapsody on La Gioconda, or Burke's lament over the decay of chivalry, or Carlyle's apostrophe to the "evening sun of July." These descriptions do not attempt to be clear and precise; rather they try to fill us with feelings, that we may feel as doubtless the writer felt. They are hardly to be analyzed, and such methods are best unattempted by amateurs. When without a genuine and contagious "glow" they are flat and bombastic.

As has been said, the tendency in literature is to use less and less formal description. Modern men of letters may have a better sense of how much description readers will stand than had the generations somewhat earlier, or, to put the matter differently, description is likely now-a-days to be used only in so far as it may maintain other kinds of writing. Thus we find Stevenson, say, introducing description bit by bit as called for; the more formal and isolated descriptions of Scott, Bulwer, G. P. R. James, Hawthorne, and others, are not so fashionable to-day. The reason, however, lies deeper than fashion: if, as we have observed, description for all practical purposes deals with what the reader has not seen or felt, a writer has to be chary of dwelling

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on the obvious or of introducing even very interesting pictures when the reader is in tune for something else. Consider, for example, the tediousness to the modern reader of the digressive descriptions in *The Marble Faun:* doubtless enthralling in their day, they are now, since the subjects have been "done" hundreds of times, interesting rather as data for *Culturgeschichte* than as readable matter. Hence literary artists are probably inclined to under-describe; they practise a rapid rather than a detailed method. Again they are likely to introduce pictures from a pretty definite point of view, that is to say, as objects would have appeared to a particular person, at a particular time, in a particular mood. Since Scott has been cited as a writer of formal descriptions which many moderns find not to their liking, it may be remarked that he was also the master of description in the most skilful modern sort. Nothing, for example, is more finished than the picture of the entrance of the Disinherited Knight into the lists at Ashby (*Ivanhoe*) which is as closely knit into the story, as good in movement, as clear in point of view, as the most exacting of modern readers could wish. The final achievement of description is, obviously, to combine such good movement with weight of matter. But weight of matter belongs to the gifted mind or the great occasion, and is outside of the subject of this book.

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The foregoing discussion of narration and description may seem to be somewhat remote; for few of us are professional writers and have little inclination to become literary artists. For the most part, we have occasion only, in letters and other small papers, to give some information about a few happenings and some objects. The general principles, however, apply to any act of narration or description; and they are somewhat more evident in novels, stories, and histories than elsewhere. The main fact is that in any composition of the kind that has been described in this chapter, you should try to go from event to event or from object to object in an orderly way, omitting such matter as may not concern the subject or be interesting to the reader; to the end, not that he may be necessarily enthralled or "gripped," or have a "new note" sounded in his soul, but usually that he may know what has happened or what certain things are like.

EXPOSITION, though theoretically dealing with facts of a different kind from those that are the delight of description and narration, may most conveniently be treated with these forms. Exposition is best understood as all explanation that is mainly not narration or description or argumentation. In exposition you do not explain for the sake of telling a story, but you

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may tell a story to explain something else. You do not describe a thing merely to make its appearance clear; you make its appearance clear that something else, — say the general and constant facts rather than individual differences, — may be better explained. You do not try to set up new beliefs or instigate a new line of conduct in the reader; rather, you present facts and theories and lines of conduct, and allow the reader to act on them in any way that he may choose or not act at all. Theoretically, exposition states and explains any facts or relations between facts; practically, one does not explain what one has reason to believe his reader already knows. In other words, we do not go to encyclopedias, or spelling-books, or cook-books, or blue-books, or agricultural journals, or railway time-tables, for what we know, or think we know, already.

Being of this very practieal, and often of this very dry, nature, exposition has far less need for literary devices than other of the so-called forms of discourse. So far as exposition is clear it is likely to be effective, and tricks for trapping attention do not have much place where men will read only on compulsion, or because the facts and theories are engaging, or in response to some real curiosity, or because of the allurement of a well-known name. To be sure, a good expounder will do things to put his readers more at their ease or to make them more attentive; he may upset a normal order or use striking phraseology,

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illustrations, and comparisons. But in exposition you mainly follow the facts, as a good hound follows the quarry, or an agile end-rush, the ball. Hence an account of exposition is an account of the kinds of facts to be presented and of the classification of these facts. These two matters may be treated separately.

A good many attempts have been made in treatises on exposition to cover all possible facts and methods. Such attempts are commonly unsuccessful for the reason that facts are continually slipping in and out of the body of human knowledge, and methods have to follow the facts. Possibly the best way of making the matter clear is to say that when we explain anything, — as water, or the workings of party government, or evolution, or what we think of college life, or China, or the subway, — we may tell what the thing is or what it does, though what it is often appears only in what it does. In the first class, exposition may be regarded as an explanation of terms and ideas; in the second, as a recounting of processes. Thus exposition is a matter of definitions and propositions, and also of developments and processes. Let us briefly consider these two aspects.

*Proposition* is probably a better term than *definition*, for the reason that the latter, like classification, suggests something dreadfully scientific, with *genus*, *differentia*, and *copula*, whereas the term proposition may be readily thought of

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as a simple declarative sentence. Now, a definition or a proposition may be thought of as underlying each piece of exposition or each major part of it. Thus the proposition underlying this particular part of the present chapter is that we find two types of expository material. From a strictly expository point of view, my business is done when I have clearly (as I trust) explained what the sentence means. This is what is done in almost any article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, in any chapter in the *American Commonwealth*, and also in any bit of thesis writing such as Mr. Chesterton's characteristically modest *What's Wrong with the World?* or the entertaining prefaces to the plays of Mr. Bernard Shaw. Frequently, to be sure, one has to take refuge in a vague proposition or definition, which would fall far short of the demands of formal logic, as for example, that the reasons for the outbreak were "many and various," or that there are two kinds of mountain railways, or that lobster is hurtful. The departure from the strict requirements of logical definition need, however, distress no one, provided always that the meaning is explained or the promise made good, — provided also that the reader is not killed with commonplace.

This idea of underlying definition might also be made to apply to process exposition, and we might say, "Bread-making is the process by which flour, yeast, and other ingredients are

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converted into bread." But it is simpler to separate this type from the definitions, conceiving the presentation of such facts to be an operation rather than a status. Thus we have recipes, railway guides, books on embryology, histories of institutions, and that vast number of expositions in which facts bear some temporal relation to one another.

Classification of phenomena would seem to be the peculiar property of exposition in that some grouping of facts is necessary, though, as we have seen (Chap. II), classification is essential to all writing. The real object of speaking of two types of exposition, in reality somewhat doubtfully to be separated, is to show more readily how classification operates. With the definition type, the important words stand for the main groups, and each of these words has in some fullness to be explained. Thus Aristotle's definition of rhetoric "as a faculty of discovering all the possible means of persuasion in any subject," evidently calls for complete explanation of *faculty*, *means*, *persuasion*, and *subject*, and such explanations he gives, at varying length, through some hundreds of pages. *Means* is, as explained in detail, by far the most bulky term, and it consequently has to be divided and subdivided. How these smaller groups should be arranged cannot be told here; as we have seen, order depends on one's conception of the facts and upon one's purpose. A good prac-

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tice is to examine the table of contents of any notable piece of exposition, which is merely an index to the grouping of the facts.

With regard to the other type of exposition, processes fall into more or less real or artificial stages, and it is usual to arrange them, — as in the process of digestion, for example, or of nail-making, — from first to last. Speaking thus, we must bear in mind that many processes have no definite starting point other than what may be arbitrarily selected. Thus blood is usually represented as flowing from the heart back to the heart, but, since the stream is continuous, it might also be represented as flowing from the lungs back to the lungs, or as making the circuit from the capillaries; and it is as a matter of fact so represented in special pieces of exposition. Thus Baedecker begins *Switzerland* at Basel, but he might have begun it at Geneva or Lugano, had he wished, and very likely would have done so had the majority of his travelers entered by Geneva or Lugano, or had he been a Frenchman or an Italian instead of a German.

It is exceedingly important to remember that, in practice, classification is usually limited rather than encyclopedic. One's purpose, modifying in turn the point of view, determines the groups into which expository matter usually falls. The encyclopedic type, theoretically, tries to tell something of everything about a subject; the scientific type attempts everything or something

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with the greatest possible accuracy of division and of fact; the far more common popular type is highly occasional. Exposition is a very pragmatic affair. Thus the term *Switzerland* may variously appear as a highly interesting bit of topography, or a fine example of certain geological phenomena, or as a complex of tourist routes with many attractive details, or as a thrilling episode of history, or as the typical home of the "Alpine man," or as an exceedingly well run country, or as a congeries of hotels and funiculars, or as the temporary abode of many Englishmen, or as a region where, every year, some scores of incautious people break their bones, or as the true garden of *edelweiss* and picture post-cards, and in many other ways, all standing for some part or aspect of truth. These, as occasion demands or permits, you expound as may be to the purpose, — encyclopedically, on rare occasions; scientifically, according to your knowledge and accuracy and certain claims of subject; particularly, in response to special inquiry; humorously, if you are so inclined. When you can use some time order, some genuine first-second-third, you do so if you are wise.

That is the whole theory of exposition; the rest is application. In general, one is dealing less with events, happenings, and appearances, than with statements, theories, principles, constant facts, all of which may be expressed by modification of the formula, "This is so" or "The

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facts are so and so." Many of these bodies of fact can be laid out in stages following one another as parts of a growth or process. In any event some classification is necessary. The rhetorical virtue of exposition is clearness. That depends largely on order, but it may be furthered by the use of literary illustration and comparisons, as well as by actual maps and diagrams.

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# CHAPTER IV

## ARGUMENTATION

ARGUMENTATION may be conceived of as a method of comparison, but here, comparison is not merely, as in exposition, for the sake of clearness, but for the sake of obtaining a new fact or set of facts. Comparison is incidental to exposition; it is the bone and marrow of argumentation. Narration, description, and exposition may treat directly, in various ways, facts derived from observation or facts of record or of imagining, but argumentation merely uses these facts as a means to some new facts. In a sense the line is between narration, description, and exposition, on the one hand, in that they deal with what is known and observed and recorded and seen; and argumentation, on the other, in that the interest of the latter is essentially in facts of inference. The judgments of argumentation are all derived, by process of comparison, from antecedent facts, and these judgments, or conclusions, may themselves be facts. Thus one may narrate events, or describe appearances, or expound definitions and processes, but if at any time there should arise a



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question as to the truth, or the workability, or the goodness, of any of these matters, the argumentative process is at once set up. If this truth, or workability, or goodness, be the important thing, the resulting affair is called argumentation rather than one of the other forms.

Argumentation is, obviously, a very common and important affair. It has been studied more systematically than any of the other forms, particularly in our own times. One may also note that Aristotle really approaches the subject of rhetoric from the argumentative point of view, and, in modern times, such books as Whately's *Rhetoric* are largely restricted to argumentation. More space is given in the present book to the subject than to the other forms of discourse, chiefly because the movement is of an essentially different sort.

Argumentation follows the general formula, "It is better" or "It is truer," the comparative degree of the adjective stating or implying a difference of judgment. Such a comparative adjective one does not always actually find, but comparison is always implied. Thus the question, "Shall I vote for the Democratic candidate?" implies that I may do other things, such as voting the Progressive ticket or staying away from the polls, among all of which a choice is to be made. "You ought, or ought not, to do thus and so" implies a comparison of possible lines of conduct. "The Insurance Act is unjust" means

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that, in the opinion of the speaker, the act does not match so well with notions of justice or workableness as the former state or some other possible measure. All subjects for argumentation, in short, reduce themselves to questions or statements like the foregoing, in all of which, it must be observed, there is an actual or an implied difference of opinion.

Some further remarks must be made before we are in a position to deal with argumentative structure. The comparisons of argumentation, like the classifications of exposition, may be made between all possible differences of opinion or of fact; they may contemplate questions in all their logical possibilities, and may be an examination of all theories and facts. But practically argumentation is much limited by occasions; it is very likely to start in some immediate call or in response to some reaction. Arguments are much more likely to proceed from something than to be cut out of whole cloth. Argumentation is likely, in short, to deal with "live" hypotheses of whatever class. Unless there is reasonable doubt or actual difference of opinion, argumentation is not likely to arise. Live questions are those in which people are interested, or which may properly be propounded at any time. Thus the nursery is full of live questions, as are also Parliament, Congress, the Press, and the scientific laboratory. Thus any question may at any time be brought into the arena, but it is

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probably trivial to ask whether the moon is made of green cheese, and many questions are outlawed from even personal discussion by reason of being of a wholly inconclusive or of a trifling nature.

Again, argumentation, though often conceived as a minister of truth, is quite as likely, in practice, to serve more mundane ends, not always of a high character. Thus the skill of the auctioneer in persuading you to buy something that you do not want, or the "possible means of persuasion" used by the blackmailer, are no less argumentation, in a broad sense, than the elaborate and varied reasons and copious evidence going to support the oft-cited Darwinian hypothesis. The types differ totally in outlook, motive, and spirit, but all aim to arrive at some belief or conduct, from the comparison of divers facts and possible lines of action.

Argumentative subjects are usually conventionalized into the form of propositions, that is, simple declarative sentences, in which something is predicated or said of the matter to be discussed. Examples are, "Luther was responsible for the Peasants' Revolt," "War is hell," "It will rain to-morrow." Such propositions may evidently be put in the form of questions, and are often so put, when it is desirable not to be too positive at the outset. In either case the argumentative process would be essentially the same. Now it is very important to note that the prop-

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ositions are not quite the same kind of thing as the propositions or definitions that we conceived as underlying exposition. There, the simple declarative sentence was, "It is so," or "The facts are these," or "The theory is as follows," whereas the argumentative proposition turns the *so*, *these*, and *as follows* into terms regarding which there is some difference of opinion and a need of arriving at another fact, which is called a conclusion. This conclusion is, in argumentation, the important part of the matter; in exposition, the facts are the important thing. In more technical language, exposition explains terms; argumentation attempts to establish propositions.

These propositions, furthermore, are not the same thing as what shows them to be true or false, tenable or dubious. They are rather real conclusions, of whatever kind, from facts, of whatever kind. Hence argumentation has a great deal to do with these foregoing facts on which the conclusions are based. These foregoing facts are called evidence. Without evidence, in this sense, there can be no argumentation; otherwise, one has to rest on assertion, and this we ought to do only when we have further good reasons, or evidence, that there are facts in support of the say-so that we accept. Confidence in authority, — as in blue-books, government reports, newspaper opinion, the word of a statesman, — is therefore one common kind

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of evidence for our beliefs; but such evidence is always open to question and is often actually questioned in more ways than can be enumerated here. We are all familiar with various aspects of the conflict between evidence and authority. Scientifically, we demand the most scrupulous care in testing evidence or fact, and in legal procedure special rules have been evolved for the acceptance of evidence and the evaluation of testimony. Popularly, many other things — fears, desires, interests, education, prejudice, natural conservatism, temperament, faith, hope, charity, and the like, count for us as evidence, or fact, in determining belief or in palliating or condemning conduct. The more rationally we live, however, the more we try to substitute for the evidence of desire and temperament, the evidence derived from science, ethics, philosophy, and all the richness of individual and national experience. Space does not permit further entrance into this enormous subject of evidence.

A writer may have good evidence and yet may be unable to use it in the production of those new facts essential to argument. To put the matter differently, one must not only have facts but must be able from them to draw conclusions of a right sort. Another great essential in argumentation is, therefore, the right application of facts to conclusions, and this application of antecedent facts to derived facts is logic. In order to understand the use of logic in argumentation one

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should note that the human mind is in various ways continually on the jump from one fact to another. Most of the derived facts are probably not worthy of decent burial, but they are still numberless. Thus, as I write these lines, rain is falling briskly, and I may remark that it rains a great deal in this country, or that the river will be swollen to-morrow, or that the phenomenon of condensation is occurring in a moisture-laden atmosphere with resulting precipitation, or I may add a great many equally intelligible and pompous things. The only fact that I directly observe is the falling of the raindrops. Even this fact I might derive from some other fact, as the appearance of people with umbrellas, or the sensation of pain in my right leg. In this manner fact goes on begetting fact: one fact may be (1) the example of another fact, as in the first of the foregoing inferences, or (2) the cause of another fact, as in the swelling of the river, or (3) the sign of another fact, as in the third instance above. Any of these facts may be just as true as the original observation that it rains, provided that they are all properly applied to one another. Much of that application is merely a matter of memory, or custom, or erudition, but the science of the correct application of fact to fact is logic, and it is as essential to argumentation as anything can be. Logic was, of course, a human practice and household necessity long before it was a formal study, but

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formal logic is of much value in purifying a process that is as common as breathing. It is the oxygen of argumentation.

The process of purification is best studied, for the purposes of argumentation, in the fallacies. Fallacy is incorrect reasoning, or, in simpler words, failure of facts to apply to other facts which we would fain have them engender. Thus, in the instances cited above, (1) I have been in this country only two days and am therefore in no position to jump from my present observation of rain to the general conclusion of much rain here; I have taken an isolated fact as if it were representative of a general condition, when the truth is that I really don't know whether there is much rain here or not: I merely know that rain is now falling. (2) It is pretty safe prophecy that the river will rise, for there is another fact to go by, namely, the common effect of adding water to water. (3) Presumably the rain is a sign that something else is happening or is the cause of the rain, and that something else is expressed in the formal language used in the preceding paragraph. If, however, I had said that the rain is evidently a sign of the precipitation of moisture, I should not have added any new fact, but should merely be repeating the old idea in other words. Thus, in the classic instance:

"*Bardolph.* Sir, pardon; a soldier is better accommodated than with a wife."

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"*Shallow.* It is well said, in faith, sir; and it is well said indeed too. Better accommodated! It is good; yea, indeed, is it: good phrases are surely, and ever were, very commendable. Accommodated! it comes of 'accommodo': very good; a good phrase."

"*Bardolph.* Pardon me, sir; I have heard the word. Phrase call you it? by this good day, I know not the phrase; but I will maintain the word with my sword to be a soldier-like word, and a word of exceeding good command, by heaven. Accommodated; that is, when a man is, as they say, accommodated; or when a man is, being, whereby a' may be thought to be accommodated; which is an excellent thing."

"*Shallow.* It is very just."—(II *Henry IV.* iii. 2.)

Though space does not permit a full account of fallacies, it may be remarked that few fallacies are commoner than this variation of words without change of facts. This fallacy vitiates the very essence of argumentative composition; for argumentative movement goes from facts to consequences different from the facts. Other well-known fallacies are: "begging the question," where the conclusion is wittingly or unwittingly assumed in the manner of stating the antecedent facts; the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy, where things following each other in time are assumed to have some causal relation, the substantiation of which depends on a correct application of still other facts, — a very common fallacy; the

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false analogy, where things alike in known respects are wrongly assumed to apply to one another in the unknown items; the false example, as in (1) above, humanly to be called the fallacy of impatience; the false use of sign, as when we reason from symptoms of any kind — expression, action, color, etc., — to causes, motives, and a variety of other things, rather in accord with predilection than sound induction; "arguing beside the point"; and a great many others. These fallacies arise when the facts and the alleged conclusions are really the same, — in consequence of which there is no movement; — or when the facts do not apply, without further evidence and reasoning, to the conclusion, — in which case the movement is illogical. For, as we have seen, the essence of argumentative movement is the production of new facts. The movement may fail, because no new facts, even of a negative kind, are derived, or because the conclusions do not follow from the premises.

It will now be evident that good argumentative movement depends very much on clear conception and clear exposition. In other words, it is of high importance to know what one is talking about, to know what facts are in his mind, to know what his conclusions are, to know how the gaps from premise to conclusion are bridged. Hence the success of argumentative structure is likely to depend not only on evidence and logic but also on definition. Here the only

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rule is to make clear, by whatever means, the sense of the terms one is using, that is, the meaning of the facts and ideas. Obviously this is an affair of varying difficulty. The proposition "collarless dogs should be shot," is not hard to define, unless the question of the agency should arise. "The Tariff Bill of 1909 was a party measure," allows us to define the first term by reference to the provisions of the act, and "party measure" is not difficult. But terms like "progress," "civilization," "socialism," trippingly household words though they are, are rarely matters of record or of uniform conception. Hence they may require a deal of definition and of repeated exposition at various times, since common conceptions of such terms are constantly changing. Hence laws and statutes tend to be specific and particular, and good expounders are always careful to define terms. Definition, then, along with propositions, evidence, and logic, may be regarded as one of the essentials of argumentation. Argumentation cannot move without the substance of which propositions are made, and without some kind of evidence, it cannot move correctly without logic; it cannot move clearly without definition. That it should move somehow is the primary condition of this, as of all forms of literary composition.

We are now in a position to suggest a formula for argumentative structure or movement. It is essentially an exposition of the reasons for

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belief or conduct. More specifically, but still roughly, it is (1) a statement of two or more opposing views or lines of action, with such definition of each as may be necessary, (2) a pronouncement of the better cause, and (3) an exposition of the reasons for that conclusion. This formula we do very commonly follow, as in the familiar model, "You might do this or you might do that, but I think that you had better do this, because," or as in the two sides of a legal process and the ensuing decision by judge or jury. Or we follow it partly, with an implication of the alternative, "You ought to go for various reasons." Or we follow it with very much bob-tailing, leaving our listeners to guess at our reasons, as in the common "I will not." Argumentation, whether a matter of two seconds' talk, or of the trial of Warren Hastings, or of the acceptance of the belief that the earth is round, may not unhandily be conceived as the formula of comparisons that has been described.

Certain minor matters of convenience may be mentioned. Things may be deemed to be true either because of good evidence for them or because allegations against them are false or irrelevant. The former of these matters is called direct proof, the latter, refutation. Structurally, it may be convenient to keep these apart; and according to principles of climax or effect or the nature of the subject, direct proof may proceed or follow refutation. Refutation, again, may be

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general or local; that is, it may be concerned with general falsity, or may try to dispose of particular objections as they arise. Again, in a large number of pieces that may be called argumentation rather than anything else, opposing reasons appear simply as texts, or pretexts, or points of departure, on which to hang one's own chain of reasoning. Many essays are of this type, and here exposition and argumentation may walk hand in hand.

As in exposition, the structure of argumentation may be thought of as falling into certain types, depending on the kind of facts with which one is dealing. Hence the simple formula outlined above may be much modified. The reader will at once recognize two great obvious classes: the "What did happen?" or "What are the facts?" class, and the type corresponding to "What will happen?" or "What will be the result?" The first is largely determined by the examination of actual records and is concerned with the correct interpretation of them; this type has to do with history and science in many departments, and with questions of personal and political veracity, and many other things. The second class is determined by inferences from past and present experiences; it has to do with plans, policies, prophecies, prognostications, and all that great group where inference is made in anticipation of actual events. This last appears in both positive and negative forms,

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whenever practical matters are under discussion: the present way should be kept up into the future, since it cannot be improved, — that is the conservative, or, vulgarly, "stand-patter," program; the present should be modified for the sake of the future; — that is the radical or progressive formula. In both cases the near or the distant future is in contemplation. Typical instances of historical questions are, "Was the execution of Louis XVI justifiable?" "Did Bacon write the plays usually attributed to Shakespeare?" "Is the Biblical account of the creation sound?" and other masterly examples of an antique description. "Futures" are naturally more lively and common, and among them are many of the bills actually before Congress and Parliament, as well as inquiries, philosophical and scientific, as to the future of the universe and the destiny of man, and the farmer's concern for his crops.

It is impossible to summarize what has been, or to prognosticate what would be, the possible variety of structure in these various questions, but certain specific formulas may be suggested, besides the general arrangement already mentioned. A common method is (1) to state various hypotheses and (2) to determine the most likely, acting or not, as may be fitting, on the likelihood. Thus the farmer acts or does not act, on the prospect of rain. Thus one will not be personally concerned with the clearly demonstrated

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fact that the earth will come to an end in one billion odd years; the coal supply is more pressing, but most of us don't think about the matter until the strike is on. Though an historical question, dealing wholly with the past, cannot turn a hair white or black the same method may be applied. This method of greatest probability may be used in arriving at all kinds of conclusions. Sometimes guess, opinion, and fact may be so analyzed from one another, to the advantage of fact, that the method might be called *the method of elimination*. This movement is likely to proceed by exclusions.

Another formula of comparison has been called *the method of functions*. The operation of this method is (1) to establish principles or standards or functions, and (2) to test any active proposition in the light of these. Burke delighted in the method, and often employed it with an effect that would have been telling had he had sufficient supporters. It is probably the conservative formula, *par excellence*, in all countries and on all active subjects. When an action or a policy is declared to be unconstitutional, or illegal, or vicious, formulas of this description are applied in various disguises. The "laws" and fashions and standards of rhetoric or dress or behavior are often invoked under this formula. Thus, again, we imply standards of moderation when we urge our friends to avoid noisiness and gluttony. The formula may also be urged in arguing

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against the continuance of practices and institutions which have not come up to expectation or have outlived their usefulness. Mill so uses it in the essay *On Liberty*, but the formula is mainly restraining rather than reforming.

In such cases as the last, however, a different formula is likely to be more convenient. This may be called *the method of objections*, a name devised, like *the method of functions*, by Mr. R. C. Ringwalt, an authority on argumentative structure. This is, on the whole, a formula of attack, of progress, of revolution, of liberalism, of reform. According to it (1) objections to any existing institution are stated and a remedy proposed. The questions then arise (2) as to whether the objections are sound or unsound, and (3) if so, whether the substitute would do away with them, without (4) introducing greater evil. The method, like the others, is capable of much modification and refinement. And if some orators lay more stress on (1) than on (2), (3), and (4), the formula is no less there.

These methods may also be variously combined, but representing as they do pretty distinct general arrangements for argumentative comparisons, one or another is likely to be dominant in most questions that have to be treated with any formality. One must bear in mind that these formulas do not take the place of definition, evidence, and logic. They rather typify certain familiar ways in which the comparisons

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indispensable to argumentation may be more clearly made.

Briefly to sum up the view of composition that has been held in the preceding chapters, writing attempts to present in more or less detail the facts related to a subject, or it molds those facts to special purposes. Though these two functions cannot be wholly separated, the very nature of language ordains movement of some kind — the writer must get from one point to another. Facts, the relation of facts to one another, and the use that is made of them, vary very vastly, but the important question in literary composition, the question of movement, can best be studied by the division of writing into four types, not distinct by any hard and fast line, but separated by the kind of treatment accorded to different classes of fact. Narration, on the whole, goes from event to event, moving through a complex of temporal relations, and also uniting events by any other means that may be available. Description moves from object to object, keeping to some order, which is usually spacial, but may also be often a matter of time relation. Exposition goes from fact to fact, or from fact to idea, or from idea to fact, or from idea to idea, sometimes simply stating matters, at other times dealing with complicated causal and temporal relations. Argumentation is the great begetter of derived facts, the Solomon among the literary methods;

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by a system of comparisons it makes new facts; it does not do its business if it makes no conclusion, even if the conclusion is that no conclusion is possible. For all these forms some stereotyped methods exist. They are of great usefulness, but new methods are constantly being found.

Of all the structural units of composition — books, parts, chapters, sections, and paragraphs — the last most merit detailed study as a means of furthering movement, and to them we will now turn.

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# CHAPTER V

## PARAGRAPHS

PARAGRAPHS furnish a fertile field for theory, and for this there is good reason. If paragraphs were the same as sections or chapters or books, on the one hand, or, on the other, as sentences, there would be no good excuse for these units of discourse, which we superficially recognize on a printed page by indentations and spacing. But there are millions of these things, some of them forming whole compositions, more of them, probably, being but parts of longer pieces of work. They do not average so long as they used to some three hundred years ago; but if we find them so short as in, say, some of Victor Hugo's romances or in the editorials of the New York *Journal*, many of us are likely to be annoyed. To call paragraphs "compositions in miniature," or to say that they are to sentences what sentences are to words, is unsatisfactory and misleading; for evidently some of them are complete compositions and some are not; and, again, there can be no such syntax of sentences in paragraphs as of words in sentences. Paragraphs may be regarded, if one wishes so to regard them, as



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congeries of sentences; that is, they may be analyzed as a series of sentence relations. That aspect of the matter will be discussed later, but for the present it will be best to consider paragraphs as performing some function in longer compositions. We can best try to find out what good paragraphing is by looking at it as a means of aiding the movement essential, in various ways, to all discourse.

Lest any one be too hopeful of determining what a paragraph *really* is, we may profitably bear in mind several very obvious facts. Of the millions of paragraphs, good and bad, no two are precisely alike in the sense of meaning precisely the same thing; each paragraph is a specific act. Paragraphs are therefore good or bad for a variety of specific reasons, all of which, however, have, in one way or another, to do with communication. Again, most paragraphs that we actually read could be written differently without detriment to the great end of composition. This point is important, since not a few writers and teachers of writing not infrequently look for a fixed rather than a flowing order of discourse, and would thrust into a mold, or treat *à la* Procrustes, matter as nimble and Protean as Loki. Formal paragraphs there are, but not all paragraphs need be formal. Lastly, it is evident that a great many good writers do no more than make indentations every few hundred words, on every page, or half-page, or so.

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Nor can we, by any known method of analysis, find among much writing surely to be accounted good any general system of paragraphing. All that can be done, therefore, is to indicate some of the functions of paragraphing and some of the more conspicuous ways in which paragraphs may better do their business.

Paragraphs are but one of many instruments of composition for helping movement. This in general they do by enabling the eye and the mind to make frequent fresh starts, a matter of moment alike to writer and reader. The breaks indicated by paragraphs act, in some ways, like shifts of scene in theaters, like stops in symphonies, or like the peaks and valleys in mountain-chains, which are more agreeable than uniform masses and straight lines. Or, to change the figure and the point of view, paragraphs are good for much the same reason that a way train is less conducive to repose than an express; the frequent stops make you sit up. They may tax your brain and, like long "locals," may give you a headache; but you take in more details by the way than when the object is to cover ground as rapidly as possible. In like manner, spoken paragraphs, indicated by pauses and changes of voice, often jostle listeners into attention. Abandoning figures of speech, which may be misleading, in that the object of passengers is to "get there," whereas of writing the aim is also to communicate facts and ideas

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as they come up, we may observe this primary function of paragraphing in two very simple instances — business letters and narrative dialogue. With the former, it is convenient to put each topic or item into a separate paragraph, and narrative conversation is much easier to read if an indentation is made whenever the speaker changes, even if he merely says "Yes" or "No." Indentations, like quotation marks, give us notice that something different is to take place. The usefulness of the conventions of paragraphing in narrative dialogue may be seen by comparing the printing of dialogue in, say, many of the eighteenth century novels with what we have now, and any one who will be at pains to do this will bless the compositor who first hit on the device. It might be answered that we find our modern method easier because we are more used to it; but the fact that it has stuck as one of the fixed conventions of writing is probably due to its usefulness.

In many other kinds of writing the case is not so simple. Breaks there are, but the resulting paragraphs follow no such conventions as we see in business letters or dialogue. They too, however, must do something to make expression clearer and reading easier. Otherwise, paragraphing would not be practised as it is to-day, when, as we all know, many writers, each in a way that may be often called his own, consciously or informally, have introduced various refine-

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ments in paragraphing and have trained it to be a very serviceable handmaid of clarity. Let us see if, in all the variety of paragraphs, there are any general functions and refinements of the functions that have been spoken of.

Discourse moves, and the question is of the part that paragraphing may perform in this movement, whether it be narrative, descriptive, expository, or argumentative. Discourse moves by the continuation of the same matter, either from a new point of view or, on occasion, by repetition in different terms — by illustration of this matter, or by exceptions to it and digressions from it; by anticipation of new matter, and the actual presentation of it, directly, or by illustration, or by exception, or by amplification, or by digression. The various additions may be simply clapped on, as in much writing, or they may be made part and parcel of a more logical structure. Evidently sentences may, in any of the ways enumerated, help discourse to move, and so, on the other hand, may sections, chapters and books. That is to say, any unit of composition, large or small, justifies itself by adding something to what has gone before; it should be about something and should make clear the place and bearing of that something — it should, in short, have unity and coherence. Any exception, illustration, digression, or what not, may possibly be put into a single sentence or even a single phrase, but whenever the result-

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ing sentence cannot be read as a unit, it may have to be broken into several sentences, each doing a different thing, and a paragraph or part of a paragraph may result, — of example, or illustration, or exception, or continuation. On the other hand, the matter may be important enough to require a whole section or chapter, which may, for reasons already given, be broken into paragraphs, of illustration, of digression, of continuation, of exception, of transition, and the many other things that we recognize as the actual performance of paragraphs.

That is the gist of the matter as a general theory. But the subject may be profitably pursued by looking at paragraphs as a matter (1) of content and place in longer compositions, (2) of transition from paragraph to paragraph, (3) of arrangement of sentences in a paragraph, and (4) of sentence connection.

Of the first of these little need be added to what has already been said: the place of paragraphs in a composition is determined by the structure of the composition. Each paragraph contains some one item of the whole, or part of an item too long for one sentence. The only really important consideration is that the item should be clear, whether it be illustration, or digression, or a statement of things to come, or a summary. In all well-made compositions, paragraphs have unity, in the sense that they are evidently about something which is part

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of something larger. The items of different paragraphs may evidently be of very unequal importance; some, as of introduction, transition, etc., may be subordinate to others of about the same length. Granted the general structure, then, all that one may ask, from this point of view, is that the place and bearing of each paragraph shall be clear, that it shall add something or promise to do so.

Paragraph transitions, the second point of attention in the study or the practice of paragraphing, appear as logical or stylistic guideposts for pointing out the direction that the paragraph is to take. They help the usual indentations of the printed page in calling the attention of the reader to something new or different. They may be single words or phrases: as *moreover* and *furthermore*, indicating the addition of new material of like bearing and quality as the old; *meanwhile*, the sign of something different happening at the same time; *hence*, *therefore*, and other words of inference, deduction, and conclusion; *as we have seen*, referring to the past and anticipating a restatement in different terms; *now*, *consider a moment*, calling for new attention; and the many other transitional phrases constantly in use. Transitions may also be complete sentences, looking forward or backward or, as in the opening sentence of the present paragraph, both forward (in the main clause) and backward (in the appositive clause). Sentences

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of this kind are sometimes called "topical," in that they state the subject or topic of the paragraph or of several paragraphs. Such topical statements do about the same thing, — but less mechanically, — as titles, italics, and black letter type in the "display" of text-books. Topical statements are common in argumentative and expository writing, but are probably not so common in narrative.

There are also end transitions, which may often take the form of a summary, or a conclusion, or both. As paragraphs with topical statements are sometimes called "deductive" in that a general statement is followed by examples and detail, so a paragraph with endings is sometimes called "inductive" because a series of details may be followed by a general statement. These terms are evidently used with great looseness; for such paragraphs are rarely deductive or inductive in any strict sense of the term. For example, the "inductive" ending of the present paragraph is to be no more than the general remark (among many possible apposite remarks) that paragraphs with summary sentences are probably less common than those with topical sentences.

Over such matters a great deal of unnecessary fuss is sometimes made. A common question, for example, "Shall I put this sentence of transition at the end of one paragraph or at the beginning of the next?" is unimportant or unan-

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swerable in a definite way. About the only principle is to do whatever will give the reader the best inkling of what is to come, if that is important, or will give him the best notion of what has been said, if that is vital. The opening sentence of the present paragraph, — if the use of another example immediately at hand may be permitted, — could have been made the closing sentence of the last paragraph, in which case some alteration of the preceding paragraph would be necessary. In its present position it demands more explanation than had it been a mere closing remark. Perhaps it had been better so; all such matters are ultimately matters of judgment of what a writer deems it worth while to emphasize. For the time being the main structural point is that a paragraph ought to say something; and to this end one uses all possible devices that are consistent with the facts to be stated. The real reason, we must always bear in mind, for speaking of such matters is to call attention to points where tinkering may be done with profit.

Turning to the internal arrangement of sentences in a paragraph — and here it will be proper, though not compulsory, to indulge in a somewhat more weighty transition than is to be found in the preceding group of three paragraphs — we find very little occasion for specific rule. We may say that there should be order in the sequence of ideas and sentences; that

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a paragraph may not unreasonably fulfil, in some way, the promise of its topic; that it is sometimes convenient to balance one part of a paragraph against another by a series of antithetical sentences, as frequently in Johnson, or by a formal opposition of beginning and ending, as sometimes in Macaulay, or by a topic set in opposition to the rest of the paragraph, as with many of our modern paradoxical writers who are masters of the formula, "It is usually thought — But the truth is." Everything depends on what one has to say, but, under that restriction and so long as there is some kind of order, any one of many arrangements may be about as good as another. The experiment of revision may actually be tried. Here is a passage from Burke, usually accounted a writer of excellent paragraphs; I take it because it happens to be in a book on *Conservatism* that I have just been reading, but one need not go far afield for illustrations of the principle:

"— (1) The robbery of your church has proved a security to the possessions of ours. (2) It has roused the people. (3) They see with horror and alarm that enormous and shameless act of proscription. (4) It has opened, and will more and more open their eyes upon the selfish enlargement of mind, and the narrow liberality of sentiment of insidious men, which commencing in close hypocrisy and fraud have ended in open violence and rapine. (5) At home we behold

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similar beginnings. (6) We are on our guard against similar conclusions.

"(7) I hope we shall never be so totally lost to all sense of the duties imposed upon us by the law of social union, as, upon any pretext of public service, to confiscate the goods of a single unoffending citizen. (8) Who but a tyrant (a name expressive of everything that can vitiate and degrade human nature) could think of seizing on the property of men, unaccused, unheard, untried, by whole descriptions, by hundreds and thousands together? (9) Who that had not lost every trace of humanity could think of casting down men of exalted rank and sacred function, some of them of an age to call at once for reverence and compassion — of casting them down from the highest situation in the commonwealth, wherein they were maintained by their own landed property, to a state of indigence, depression, and contempt?" — (*Reflections on the Revolution in France.*)

Antecedent ideas may have called for this order, but these facts, on the face of them, would be as clear, logically but perhaps not persuasively, if arranged as follows, with the alteration merely of pronouns (the sentences are numbered to save space): 1, 5, 6, 2, 3, 4 (or 4, 3), 9, 8, (or 8, 9), 7; or, again, 5, 6, 1, 2, 3, 4, (or 4, 3), 9, 8 (or 8, 9), 7. Sentences 5 and 6 are really the only ones in "inevitable" sequence, and, even so, Burke could have omitted either or both of these had

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he not thought them worth while. Why Burke adopted the actual order no one can know positively. He spent a year in writing and revising the *Reflections*. Probably the order "came" to him and he saw no reason for changing it. Had he wished he could obviously have used more connective words.

What is true of the Burke passage applies more or less to almost all paragraphs that one actually reads. But sometimes, especially in expository and argumentative passages, sentences would seem to develop from one another in a pretty natural order of sequence and logic. A fair example is the following, where, granting that the writer knew what he wanted to say, the sequence of the sentences cannot readily be altered:

"Like other tyrannies, the tyranny of the majority was at first, and is still vulgarly, held in dread, chiefly as operating through the acts of the public authorities. But reflecting persons perceived that when society is itself the tyrant — society collectively, over the separate individuals who compose it — its means of tyrannizing are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its political functionaries. Society can and does execute its own mandates: and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppres-

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sion, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself. Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough: there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development, and, if possible, prevent the formation of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own. There is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence; and to find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs, as protection against political despotism." — (J. S. Mill: *On Liberty.*)

Again, an occasional narrative paragraph will be found to develop in point of time from sentence to sentence so well that the movement could hardly be bettered with the same material. Here is an example:

"Here on shipboard the matter [*i. e.*, that people judge by clothes] was put to a more complete test; for, even with the addition of speech and manner, I passed among the ladies for precisely the average man of the steerage. It

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was one afternoon that I saw this demonstrated. A very plainly dressed woman was taken ill on deck. I think I had the luck to be present at every sudden seizure during all the passage; and on this occasion found myself in the place of importance, supporting the sufferer. There was not only a large crowd immediately around us, but a considerable knot of saloon passengers leaning over our heads from the hurricane-deck. One of these, an elderly managing woman, hailed me with counsels. Of course I had to reply; and as the talk went on, I began to discover that the whole group took me for the husband. I looked upon my new wife, poor creature, with mingled feelings; and I must own that she had not even the appearance of the poorest class of city servant-maids, but looked more like a country wench who should have been employed in a roadside inn. Now was the time for me to go and study the brass plate." — (Stevenson: *The Amateur Emigrant.*)

But the majority of paragraphs have no such excellent sequence. About all that one can demand of paragraphs, from the present point of view, is that they shall have some intelligible order and that they shall be free from needless repetitions. To make the case as complete as may be where exposition and illustration must be much curtailed, let us cite a bad paragraph:

"Our late war with Spain has shown conclusively the temperament of the American people

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as a whole. And it has done it through a great medium, namely, the newspapers. Any one with a tolerably good knowledge of human nature might, by observation on the trains, which daily bring their loads of passengers to the city, or on the ferry-boats, determine for themselves with what sort of man the news-boy or train-boy is dealing when they see what paper is bought." — (Student's theme.)

Herein the last sentence evidently has nothing to do with the first two sentences, and, being also jejune, might as well be destroyed. If the first sentence were taken as the text for one paragraph, and the second sentence for another paragraph, something passable might be developed from each; but evidently many other ways of setting the paragraph in order would be equally good.

Development of some kind — that is the main thing; but a paragraph may develop in many different ways. Thus Mill, from the opening sentence of the foregoing quotation could have gone on to predicate a number of interesting things about the fear that the crowd has of the police or the military as being in their opinion, not the instruments, but the actual sources of power. But he chose to talk of one of several opposites to that idea. Thus Macaulay could have shown in many other ways than that actually chosen that "The place was worthy of such a trial," and Shakespeare doubtless could have

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explained "To be or not to be" in quite different terms from "fardels" "oppressor's wrong," "contumely" "undiscovered country," etc., had he happened to do so.

All that the foregoing discussion of sequence amounts to, in general and in the rough, is this: that there should be sequence, that one thing should be added to another, in about any way that the writer may choose so long as it says something that he wishes to say. From this point of view, many paragraphs that we write or read are bad as to internal order; many different arrangements or developments, all of a good kind, are possible with most material that we use; only in rare cases is structure of paramount excellence achieved. In every event, you have to allow the writer his facts, but may properly quarrel with him if he is not clear, or if his sentences eddy, or if he wastes your time with triviality. That is the human and actual state of the case.

Turning now to the last matter, it is evident that in any of the foregoing paragraphs there could have been a more liberal use of sentence connectives. Had more been used in the Burke passage, the order could less easily have been changed, but no connectives could have bolstered up the newspaper theme. What sentence connectives are may most readily be seen by citing a paragraph in which almost none are to be found and a paragraph in which there are several:

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1. "The penetrating power of this remarkable genius among all classes at home is not inferior to its diffusive energy abroad. The phrase 'household book' has, when applied to the works of Mr. Dickens, a peculiar propriety. There is no contemporary English writer whose works are read so generally through the whole house, who can give pleasure to the servants as well as to the mistress, to the children as well as to the master. Mr. Thackeray without doubt exercises a more potent and plastic fascination within his sphere, but that sphere is limited. It is restricted to that part of the middle class which gazes inquisitively at the 'Vanity Fair' world." etc. — (Walter Bagehot: *Charles Dickens.*)

2. "*Meanwhile*, Ethan Brand had resumed his seat upon the log, and moved, *it might be*, by a perception of some remote analogy between his own case and that of this self-pursuing cur, he broke into an awful laugh, which, more than any other token, expressed the condition of his inward being. *From that moment*, the merriment of the party was at an end; they stood aghast, dreading lest the inauspicious sound should be reverberated around the horizon, and that mountain should thunder it to mountain, and so the horror be prolonged upon their ears. *Then*, whispering to one another that it was late, — that the moon was almost down, — that the August night was growing chill, — they hurried homewards, leaving the lime-burner and little

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Joe to deal as they might with their unwelcome guest. *Save for these three human beings,* the open space on the hillside was a solitude, set in a vast gloom of forest. *Beyond that darksome verge,* the firelight glimmered on the stately trunks and almost black foliage of pines, intermixed with the lighter verdure of sapling oaks, maples, and poplars, while here and there lay the gigantic corpses of dead trees, decaying on the leaf-strewn soil," etc. — (Hawthorne: *Ethan Brand.*)

The first of these depends for its internal coherence almost entirely on the position of sentences, which, as in many paragraphs, might be changed somewhat without serious harm. In the second, any logical order of sentences is made more evident by special bindings and references. These are in general of two kinds: (1) special words and phrases, such as *meanwhile* and *then,* and (2) departures from the normal sentence order to the end that like notions may be as near together as possible: *e. g., From that moment, Save for these three human beings, beyond that darksome verge,* etc. Between the very moderate extremes represented by these two instances, all manner of shades and varieties will be found; and the great number of possible and actual paragraphs reveals endless opportunity for varying combinations, depending on the ideas to be conveyed, on judgment, and on personal preference for *style coupé* or *style soutenu.*

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Here we touch on matters of style, and to these the remainder of this book will be devoted. Before beginning a new chapter, however, it will be well to summarize, from a new point of view, what has already been said. Applying our principles of unity, coherence, and emphasis, we may say that the first has largely to do with the content of the paragraph. Herein the only general rule is that the paragraph should be clearly about something — something, on the whole, too large for one sentence and too small to occupy a section or a chapter; and that it should make distinct, if unimportant, additions to what has gone before. Coherence means that the place of paragraphs in a whole composition and that the relations of sentence to sentence within a paragraph should be sound, that is to say, intelligible, even if the idea be unsound and false, and even if some other arrangement might be quite as good. Such relations are made more evident, not infrequently to monotony, by the use of transitional phrases, sentences, and words. Emphasis is the use of any means whatsoever, — sharp transitions, topic sentences, antithesis, short sharp sentences, rhetorical questions (cf. Burke, *ante*), — whereby the meaning of the paragraph is made more distinct. Evidently, as Professor Wendell has pointed out (*English Composition*, Chap. III), the beginning and the end of the paragraph more readily catch the eye, and hence emphasis may more naturally

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and economically be applied at these points, as in the topic sentence; but a short, simple sentence in the midst of longer sentences is also emphatic.

Attempts have from time to time been made to theorize on the structure of the ideal paragraph, as that it should contain (1) a statement in one sentence, (2) an amplification of the statement in one or more following sentences, and (3) a summary of the final sentence. Doubtless some writers have followed methods akin to this, but any such one-two-three order cannot readily be found in the great mass of good paragraphing. Nor, if a writer always followed such a formula, would his paragraphs be wholly free from the incubus of monotony, unless he exorcised this by means of a great variety of specific detail. Again, the suggestion that in a well-considered paragraph one may conjoin the subject of the first sentence with the predicate of the last sentence to make a summary of the whole, does not accord with the facts of actual good paragraphing, especially in narrative. About all that can be done by way of study is to read, with some attention to structure, some thousands of paragraphs from the hundred million good paragraphs that we have, thereby to cultivate a sense for paragraphing, or, perhaps more accurately, a sense for some sort of good paragraphing. For the only excuse for this common unit of style lies in its being one of many devices for tickling

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the movement of discourse and also for enabling the reader to masticate, in mouthfuls of convenient size, what might otherwise be troublesome by reason of bulk, or vexatious like eating rice or oatmeal grain by grain.

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# CHAPTER VI

## SENTENCES AND WORDS: STYLE

We now come to that aspect of writing which may most conveniently be called *style*. The word is vague and any vagueness must be cleared away before the place of style in the study of English composition will be evident. Style is, on the whole, manner; and style of writing is manner of writing. Thus we speak of English style, or manner of writing, as of speech, or dress, or behavior; and it may be remarked incidentally that through long use and habit, rather than for logical reasons, all of us are likely to presume a greater amount of ultimate perfection in our own style or manner than in that of foreign peoples or tongues. Or, again, we speak of the style of the eighteenth century, or its manner of expression, or the style of De Quincey, that is to say, of his manner of expressing himself. Addison is sometimes said to have a "perfect" style, but the praise merely means that his manner of writing, considering what he had to say and to whom he had to speak, was so good that no one could readily see how to better it. Hence also we describe style much in the same way as



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we should describe manner, calling it good, bad, ornate, simple, distinguished, commonplace, vulgar, precise, cheap, flashy, or what not. And we also try both to name its effects and to analyze the causes thereof.

Style, then, in this sense, applies to any writing whatever, is the manner of any piece of writing whatever; it applies to all writing; is something possessed by all writing. But it happens that we do not bother to use the term in connection with most writing; for most writing is neither sufficiently bad nor sufficiently good and popular to be worth describing. The description of style, again, has to do with differences rather than likenesses. That is to say, a thing — English literature, eighteenth-century literature, De Quincey, Addison, for example, — does not begin to have style until it begins to show differences of manner from other objects of its class — French literature, Elizabethan literature, Arnold, Ruskin, Steele, Swift, and so forth. If these differences did not exist, could be neither felt nor formulated, such a thing as style would not attract any attention. In such an event the term "style of writing" would equal *writing* rather than *manner of writing*. It is, of course, quite possible to look upon the common matters as the real basis of style; that is to say, to regard the fundamental, common, everyday facts of the English language as the most important affair, to attempt to describe these phenomena, and to

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stick as close to them as possible. And that is evidently what the more sensible books on style actually do, either directly or by assumption.

Since, however, style is most evident in differences, we need not be astonished to find that the term has taken on many new and curious meanings. These more limited views tend to dwell on differences, until these differences may become the result to be aimed at. Individual style does not exist without differences of some kind, but it is another thing to erect these differences, or any differences that may be trumped up, into the matter of special importance, over and above the essential differences that must arise in various subjects and in diverse personalities. Two, among several, of these conceptions of style may be mentioned. Over and above intelligibility, which is the natural aim of all language, style, as a special result, is conceived to be an expression of personality, of individuality, of "the writer's sense of fact." No original writer can help expressing his personality; but evil enters into the literary world when that personality is made the important thing to be cultivated and expressed. Again, style is sometimes imagined to be a very rare and subtle essence, possessed only of the literary elect, as when we say, "He has *style*." Style in this sense we pride ourselves on being able to detect, as if we were literary tea-tasters; but we cannot tell what we mean by the term, and the presence of

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the volatile fragrance would probably not be detected in equal amounts in any literary production by different literary analysts.

The reason for speaking of these two aspects of style is really to drop them, to get them out of our system, — not that they may not exist, but that they are in the way of the present discussion, which attempts to explain style on a more democratic principle. Practical teachers of composition all know how such conceptions as have been named get in the way of the young writer, and Mr. Harrison, in an interesting address entitled *On English Prose* tells us that "style cannot be taught." Nobody in his senses wishes to do so, knowing that it is as idle to give instruction in the art of expressing individuality, of being oneself, of joining the chosen band of the naturally gifted, as it would be to attempt to teach youth how to become self-made men. The real question is not that you should try to express something over and above your ideas and facts, but that whatever you have to say should be said well rather than ill, in the broadest sense. That is the point in which style is good or bad. Far more fruitful it will be, therefore, to revert to the process of writing, to its great aim of intelligibility in order to see just what part the study of style may play in the process. This we have done in the larger units. It remains to do with words and sentences, or, more properly, with words combined into sentences. This is

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the point at which style may best be attacked, and therefore when the term "style" is used in the following pages it will be understood to deal with combinations of words and sentences, rather than with plan or organization of ideas.

As in composition, where the study of the subject is really finding out how a common and variable task may be better done, and to what points heed may best be given, so, of sentences and words, the study is one of points to keep in mind. Most of us do more or less writing, and we are likely, after more or less thinking over what we wish to say, to set down our ideas according to some plan. In setting down our ideas we are obliged to use the ordinary medium of words combined into sentences. Words uncombined have, as we saw in Chapter I, no value except in exclamations or answers to specific questions where, indeed, the combination is implied; the essential act of writing is a series of predications about the ideas for which certain words stand. If these predications do not satisfy us, we revise and tinker them until they better meet our needs. The actual questions which any one may ask himself of expression, — that is of the phraseology rather than the arrangement of material, — are whether his expression says what he wishes it to say, and, secondly, whether it may not be made more pleasing and agreeable both to himself and to his reader. It is perhaps inconsistent with the facts of actual

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practice of even the highest order, as it is surely inconsistent with what psychology teaches us regarding human motives, to make the measure of goodness simply "the economy of the reader's attention," as did Spencer in his altruistic essay, *The Philosophy of Style*. For it is evident that the idea has claims to be accurately represented; no writer is probably quite free from a desire or an impulse to please himself according to his lights, however they may have been kindled; and the seductions of language for one who hath music in his soul are manifest. Here formal rhetoric may come to one's aid, and, by drawing suggestions from past experience and general judgment, or by interposing such appropriate knowledge as we have of vocabularies, of grammar, of versification, and so forth, may indicate points at which improvement may be made. But this application must always be regarded as a tinkering process, for the reason that most writers are in possession of ideas to be expressed and of enough words to make some showing. Corrections in manuscript, whether of elementary matters of spelling, grammar, and simple usage, or in accordance with the more advanced tricks of style, concern themselves, actually for the most part, with only a small percentage of what is written.

The tinkering process is very multifarious, is applied at many different points, in a great number of productions of all qualities. Hence

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in a general treatise such as the present, some classification of the possibilities is necessary. Many systems are possible, but for our purposes, the most convenient may be based on a very broad division of writing actually in manuscript and print. Much of this writing — not necessarily so much in substance as in composition — is so deficient or so crude that it may not pass muster in a civilized community or even in a locality. Its disabilities may range from illiteracy not offset by any virtue, to a too great amount of incorrectness, vagueness, inaccuracy, or loquacity. More of the writing is of a competent sort, is free from the faults of the former class, but it is also marked by this outstanding fact — that it could have been done differently in detail without detriment. To this class belongs the work of most of our men of letters, — our preachers, our journalists, our novelists, our historians, etc., — and there is no name in English literature that is at all points excluded from it. There are, in other words, a dozen good ways of saying almost anything, and our competent writers simply hit upon one way rather than another. Of only a comparatively small number of actual passages may it be said that they seem to be as good as possible. These constitute the third class.

The relation of English composition to these groups allows us to classify the various kinds of tinkering with words and sentences which is now

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our business. Of the first class one aims to remove stylistic disabilities, to make any piece of writing at least negatively good. With regard to the second, it would be somewhat futile and gratuitous to instruct competent men in the art of turning good into "inevitable" passages. The legitimate and more modest aim is suggested by the fact that much correct writing is, as writing, not particularly interesting even though by men of social and intellectual eminence. Good prose style comes down ultimately to clearness and to movement, that is, to its faculty of not only making clear whatever is said, but also of keeping alive whatever ideas are added to one another. From this point of view, therefore, the task of English composition is to tinker words and sentences, already assumed to be correct enough, into such increment of meaning and of movement as is worth the trouble. The third class, the very good writing, English composition lets alone, except by way of admiration and analysis, whereby to arouse interest in good writing and to show the outcome of successful tinkering.

It will accordingly be convenient, in the following chapters, to attempt some explanation of correctness as applied to combinations of words into sentences. This part of the matter must necessarily be explained in a negative way; for, in writing, as in law and custom, correctness is detected by offences against it. Incorrectness, in other words, is the positive thing; there is

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no rule for correctness except to avoid specific incorrectness; within these limits correctness may be a thousand things. Within these limits, again, the positive question is of the various ways in which style may be improved. The betterment of meaning and of movement as they are affected by the number, place, and kind of words in sentences is therefore the next logical subject. Condensation and emphasis, for example, affect both meaning, that is, clearness of idea, and movement, that is, the rate at which ideas may be developed or be taken in. But there is of movement another aspect which is independent of meaning, wherein movement has to do with such matters as tone and rhythm. These are the lubricants of style; at their best they are a great thing, at their worst they find an analogue in the suavity of the word-charmer. In the following chapters, accordingly, correctness of style, the increment of meaning and of movement, and what for want of a better term may be called "pure movement," will be taken up.

It should be borne in mind that there is necessarily a conflict between many of the desiderata herein indicated. You may sacrifice precision to suggestiveness, on the ground that more work will really be done; or you may use words less for carrying power than because they fit well into a sonorous unit. Nor do readers and critics place anything like the same value on different elements of style. The presence or absence of the

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clever line, the smart phrase, the new minted word, the resounding cadence, the delicate alliteration, may make the difference, to many people, between good and mediocre work. Beyond mere elementary matters, there is really very little consensus of opinion as to what are the signs of good combinations of words into sentences. Certainly there is no one criterion. The nearest approach to one covering phrase is the common counsel, "to write English" or the common condemnation, "He does not write English." But what is it "to write English"? All that one can do is to expound some of the more important stylistic *as's*, and to make some application of them to the various types of composition that have been discussed in earlier chapters.

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# CHAPTER VII

## STYLE: CORRECTNESS

CORRECTNESS of style appears principally as the avoidance of words not in good use and, conversely, as the attainment of as great an accuracy as possible; as the correction of bad constructions and poor unity in sentences; and as the observance of certain conventions of form and tone. These may be treated in order.

Words not in good use are commonly divided into two classes: barbarisms and improprieties. Barbarisms, in English discourse, are such words as are not English; in a sense they may be thought of independently of the sentence, though there is no reason for considering them except as they may possibly figure in actual writing. Improprieties, on the other hand, are entirely good English words which happen, in any given passage, to be used in an un-English sense; they do not, therefore, exist apart from the context. Barbarism is but another name for peculiarity of wording; impropriety, for inaccuracy of wording. Of peculiarity and of inaccuracy there are evidently many kinds and degrees. That there are such things as barbarisms and impro-



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prieties obviously depends upon the conception of the English language as a common and current medium for the interchange of ideas among men and women. No attempts to fix boundaries to this constantly swelling stream have been successful; a fact of great importance is there, but what the fact is has never been exactly defined, even less than it is possible completely to define the term Mississippi River. Hence there is much room for dispute among the laymen, students, editors and writers playing along the banks. The only way to approach a settlement of such matters is by way of typical instances, and accordingly a few representative kinds of both classes of linguistic sin may be cited.

Words as actually used in discourse may be peculiar or barbarous for several reasons. They may be obsolete or obsolescent; they have long since sunk or are tending to sink as sediment to the bottom of the stream of language. *Foreword*, where we should ordinarily say *preface*, *mine host*, where custom calls for *manager*, *landlord*, *proprietor*, or *bartender*, and a good many modern literary affectations, are examples of archaism; the stream is muddied by the stirring up of silt. Foreign words for which there are good English equivalents, — *née*, *furore*, and the like, — constitute another division. New words and new coinages, where there are now adequate words for the idea, are also regarded as barbarisms: *burglarize* and *burgle*, *vacationize*, a *combine* in

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business or in billiards, *educationalist* for *educator*, and many others in all English countries are of this sort; the liveliness of the termination *ize* allows them to be coined almost at will. Localisms, slang in which new words are made, abbreviations without the period or the apostrophe (as *photo* or *phone*, *prof* or *gov*), common in all countries, are other classes which there is not space to illustrate. Even the technical terms of science, art, sport, and politics, may be regarded as barbarisms, just as it is possible to look upon such convenient words as *gag*, *guillotine*, *kangaroo*, etc., as instances of localisms of the impropriety sort. Vulgarisms, as *ain't*, *tasty*, *pants*, are probably as objectionable as any peculiar words. There are evidently hundreds of barbarisms of various shades in the *corpus* of English writing. Some of them, especially the more recent, will not appear in any dictionary; but repositories like the *Century Dictionary* and *The New English Dictionary* are surer than anything else to explain the respects in which any given word or usage of a word does not flow with the stream of current English. At all events, such books are the best general sources for getting at somewhat elusive facts.

Theoretically the general objection to peculiar words is that they are likely to be misunderstood or that more usual words make them needless. In the latter instance, they are assailed on grounds of taste, which word suggests endless

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possibilities for strife. Actually the case is far different. *Burglarize, photo, typist, ain't,* are clear enough for ordinary purposes; one may pooh-pooh at *foreword,* but not because one doesn't understand it; we cannot get along without localisms, as may be illustrated by our saying *baggage-car* and *ticket-office* in America and *luggage van* and *booking office* in England; and technical words have to be employed in all sciences, arts, and mechanical occupations. Nor must it be forgotten that many words now commonly used would surely, at some time in their history, have been regarded as barbarisms had the modern type of rhetorical mind then existed; the plain citizen has doubtless at all periods of history been obliged to say, "What a funny word; I don't know what you mean by it." As Mr. Pearsall Smith points out (*The English Language,* Chap. V), our standard writers were once innovators in language. Again, for dramatic purposes, colloquialisms and slang have to be employed, and they are also often useful in direct discourse. As a matter of fact, probably no such thing exists as a "well of English undefiled," any more than there is a pure physical type; at all events no two critics would agree in their application of the term "pure English" to any given piece of writing. For practical purposes, then, about the only advice that can be given with regard to barbarisms is to avoid, so far as seems wise, any peculiarities of language, whether reversions to

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old days, or new experiments, or foreign borrowings, or technicalities, or slang, or localisms, or vulgarisms. Yet even this rule cannot be pressed very far; for it is on the whole contrary to what is always happening in language. One does not wish to offend the taste or to shock the intelligence of his readers, but one has often to reckon with divided usage, and, in writing, as in every active concern in life, one has to take risks. In any event, the risk is not great; for barbarisms, as we have seen, eddy about the banks of language and do not affect the main stream.

To call a word an impropriety is to say that it is inaccurately used; but what is it to use a word inaccurately? The obvious answer is that a word is inaccurately used when it conveys an idea different from what you would have it convey. The fault may lie with the writer, but it may also be due to the ignorance of the reader, like *ransom*, in the instance in *Huckleberry Finn*. Not being responsible for the ignorance of his reader, the writer's first duty is to use the word in the ordinary English sense; and that is about what is meant by the rhetorical definition of the term, "An impropriety is a word used in a sense not English." Most words of ordinary speech are obviously hard to use in an un-English sense; for they stand for familiar objects — *broom*, *water*, *clock* — or for familiar actions — *walk*, *run*, *eat* — or for familiar characterizations — *good*, *pretty*, *late*. The human tendency is to

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use words that will be understood; that, like health, self-preservation, and the like, is the normal tendency. But if, as in modern politics, such well-known objects as *whip*, *steam-roller*, *guillotine*, and *kangaroo* are used to stand for certain modes of alleged partisan procedure, are these words then used inaccurately, in a sense that is not English? There are many such words. To rail against them is absurd, in that to do so is often to draw up an indictment against a whole nation; it is far better to use them if convenient, rather than to lament the decay of the "dear mother tongue." To use rather than lament is what people commonly do.

Evidently the question of accuracy is a very varied one. Words are inaccurate only in their context, but this fact causes improprieties to be, in actual practice, much more common than barbarisms. That is to say, where one word in actual writing is peculiar, ten are probably inaccurate in the sense that some other word would more commonly stand for the thought. This matter may be made clearer by a few general observations.

One of the great discoveries of modern language study is the fact of vocabularies, as opposed to a standard vocabulary. Vocabularies have always existed in a far greater variety and with much more shading of detail than may be possibly represented by scientific categories. Indeed, the real truth is that there is no such

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thing as vocabulary but only some hundreds of thousands of words; to this truth *vocabularies* gets considerably closer than *vocabulary*. Now such vocabularies, in so far as they are real and separable from one another, have sprung from the needs of different occasions, communities, ideas, and occupations. It is pleasant to represent them in pairs; for one kind of vocabulary tends to suggest its opposite. Types of expression tend to hunt in couples. Thus we have learned words and popular words, poetical diction and prosaic diction, literary usage and colloquial usage, propriety and slang, dramatic and impersonal language, stock and individual phrasing, convention and originality, commonplace and cleverness, style and commonplace, class language and the common stock, literal and figurative words, charming diction and cacophony. One can go on multiplying these pairs till the cows come home or the resources of the dictionary are a-weary. They will have a more or less real value and existence, in so far as the characterization applies to certain prevalent phenomena of wording in any piece or pieces of writing or to the usage in any part of a country. About all that can be said of many pieces of English is that they are to be stylistically characterized by one of the words in each of these and other possible pairs. The object of these pairs is to describe without vituperation and also to name occasions and conditions.

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These various kinds of words imply that inaccuracy is not the same thing on all occasions. A scientific or a technical word, for example, has to be used with much greater accuracy and precision than those words that name familiar objects and describe common acts; indeed, careful writers are often at pains to define certain words when the quality of the audience or the nature of the subject makes perfect understanding necessary. At the other extreme, poetical words or slang words are susceptible of no such definition; the object is to make them do as much work as possible without telling how it is to be done. Slang is much condemned, and for the most part justly so; but the objection comes down to the fact that a word so used is made a jack-of-all trades. The majority of words used as slang are quite "pure" English, — *fierce*, *bunch*, *thick*, *rotten*, *swagger*, and the like, — but in so far as these are slang it is because they are used out of their more general association in the interests of a special class of people — college youth, "smart sets" prize-fighters, jockeys, Congressmen, M.P.'s, financiers, play-actors, cow-boys, fishwives — in varying degrees of blatancy. The dislocation of some of these words from common custom may be slight and wholly justified by the particular occasion, or it may be due to cheap convention, or, on the other hand, to pure joy in dislocation. Writing is, on the whole, likely to be more accurate and cor-

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rect if we try to make each word whatever do its most usual work, not urging it beyond its custom. Thus *bunch* is inaccurate if used to stand for *group, clique, body, party, assemblage, mass, large amount,* and many other words of different shades for which it is actually substituted in modern slang. Generally slang tends to destroy synonyms and hence to impoverish language. But, on the other hand, certain slang phrases are so vigorous that they do their work better than previously used words and consequently stick in the colloquial speech. Slang supplies the best example of popular impropriety, but the other pairs that have been named may be subjected, with varying results, to a similar analysis.

No standard of inaccuracy or of impropriety can accordingly be fixed. The modern tendency is, indeed, all the other way — not to disdain any word "not sanctioned by Johnson," but to admit the existence of different kinds of ideas calling for different grades of exactness, and to recognize occasions calling for varying degrees of formality or undress, vigor or precision, freedom or conformity. To be sure of oneself in such a matter one must obviously know many, many words; the greater his command over words and their associations the better. So far as the matter is amenable to rule, the only rule is this: use that word which most exactly conveys your meaning, is most truthful to the facts, allowing

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for whatever change must be made for the satisfaction of the taste or the intelligence of the reader. At all events, improprieties will number but a very small part of all the words in any article, but a few of them wantonly introduced may readily upset a whole discourse. In any event, however, it will be impossible to satisfy the taste and intelligence of all readers; from which point of view impeccable English does not exist, and never has existed, except in Coleridge's conception of Shakespeare.

Solecisms are technically defined as constructions that are not English, that is, as departures from the customary English syntax. Popularly, however, solecisms are about any kind of linguistic error, and a little reflection will make it clear that they cannot at all points be distinguished from improprieties. Often they are syntactic aberrations, of which the failure of a verb to agree with its subject, the use of an adjective for an adverb, the double negative, such improper contractions as *ain't*, and *don't* (for *does not*) and other grammatical slips are the most illiterate manifestations. Less flagrant, though even more common, are those errors arising from false position of words, particularly in the correlatives *either — or*, *neither — nor*, *not only — but also*, *such — as*, *so — that*, etc., and such also as arise from the loose placing of modifiers, of which *only* (*e. g.*, "He only made one run," and "He made only one run") and *like* (*e. g.*, "I want

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to go like the deuce," and "I want like the deuce to go") are special sinners. Here the construction is objectionable chiefly because it may not say what is wished. Another kind of solecism is found in the confusion of different verbs, as *lie* for *lay*, *sit* for *set*, and parts of those brethren *shall* and *will* and *should* and *would*, whereof the distinctions, in the last two instances, are difficult to master and are tending to become lost. Failure to use prepositions and conjunctions as exactly as possible is an especially fertile field for the growth of solecisms. We laugh at the antics of foreigners in using them, but, in doing so, we forget that pages are exceptional in which *and*, *but*, *for*, *because*, *or*, *in*, *into*, *by*, *between*, *among*, *with*, *at*, *to*, *when*, *where*, *while*, *whereas*, *since*, *as*, *though*, or any one of several others, is not misused. With some of these words usage varies: thus an Englishman would say *different to*, *directly he had gone*, whereas an American, quite as correctly, would say *different from*, *directly after*, or *as soon as*, *he had gone*. There are more kinds and degrees of solecisms than can be enumerated here; they bulk large in such books as *Lists of Improper Expressions*, *Blank Thousand Words Commonly Misused*, and the like.

The mere avoidance of barbarisms, improprieties, and solecisms, however, will not result in correct writing. One might escape illiteracy but not necessarily confusion, though the mere act of revision of style from any point of view

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probably tends to induce clarity. Of much more moment are those matters which relate to the substance of the sentence and to its internal construction. To know what a sentence is saying is important, more important than anything else about it. That is rarely interfered with, directly, by the presence of barbarisms and not grievously, for the most part, by improprieties and solecisms, as they actually occur in writing; these things cause sorrow chiefly to the erudite or to the parvenu of style, whom they offend rather than confuse; the populace cares very little about them. Improprieties may evidently result in looseness and ambiguity, and you may occasionally have to guess through the meaning of a solecism. But there is a worse matter. Here is a sentence containing, so far as we may be sure, no example of the three sins that have been specified; but is none the less an obscure affair:

"The vague and unsettled suspicions which uncertainty had produced of what Mr. Darcy might have been doing to forward her sister's match which she had feared to encourage, as an exertion of goodness too great to be probable, and at the same time dreaded to be just, from the pain of obligation, were proved beyond their greatest extent to be true." (Quoted from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* by Professor A. S. Hill — *The Principles of Rhetoric*, p. 182.)

This may mean: "The vague and unsettled

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suspicions which uncertainty had produced of what Mr. Darcy might have been doing to forward her sister's match were proved beyond their greatest extent to be true. These suspicions she had feared to encourage, as an exertion of goodness too great to be probable. At the same time she dreaded them to be just, and her dread arose from the pain of being under any obligation to Mr. Darcy."

Or it may mean: "She had herself feared to encourage her sister's match, and she had only vague and unsettled suspicions as to what Mr. Darcy might be doing to forward it. For him to have helped it along would have been an exertion of goodness too great to be probable. At the same time the idea that her suspicions might be just filled her with dread of the pain of being under obligation to him. Yet these suspicions were proved beyond their greatest extent to be true."

Probably the following is better, but one may not be sure: "Uncertainty as to what Mr. Darcy was doing to forward her sister's match filled her with vague and unsettled suspicions. These she had feared to encourage, since any act of his would have been an exercise of goodness too great to be probable. Yet, on the other hand, she dreaded that these suspicions might be just, for she did not wish to be under obligation to him. But the event showed that he had done as much as she had ever imagined him to be doing."

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Obviously it is the duty of the writer in any case to tell us what he does mean by his collection of words in a sentence. That can be done only by his knowing what he wishes to say and by recasting the sentence to accord with the thought.

Here are some sentences by a writer of considerable name as a stylist. You can see what they mean, but not at once:

"As soon as she [the Princess] had gone, Lady Windermere returned to the picture-gallery, where a celebrated political economist was solemnly explaining the scientific theory of music to an indignant virtuoso from Hungary, and began to talk to the Duchess of Paisley. She looked wonderfully beautiful with her grand ivory throat, her large blue forget-me-not eyes, and her heavy coils of golden hair."—(O. Wilde: *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime.*)

Note how the interpolation of the extraneous details and the loose introduction of *she* in the second sentence pull you up roundly. The main trouble is that Wilde wished, for satirical purposes, to make the parenthetical remarks, but, as complete sentences, these clauses would have distorted the paragraph. What was he to do, poor chap, except to forego the doubtful humor altogether or crowd it in? So also from the same hand:

"They were both so charming, and they loved each other so much, that every one was delighted at the match, except the old Marchioness of

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Dumbleton, who had tried to catch the Duke for one of her seven unmarried daughters, and had given no less than three expensive dinner-parties for that purpose, and, strange to say, Mr. Otis himself." — (*The Canterville Ghost.*)

Here is a sentence from an essay on style by one of the alleged masters thereof:

"Dismissing then, under sanction of Wordsworth, that harsher opposition of poetry to prose, as savoring in fact of the arbitrary psychology of the last century, and with it the prejudice that there can be but one only beauty of prose style, I propose here to point out certain qualities of all literature as a fine art, which, if they apply to the literature of fact, apply still more to the literature of the imaginative sense of fact, while they apply indifferently to verse and prose, so far as either is really imaginative — certain conditions of true art in both alike, which conditions may also contain in them the secret of the proper discrimination and guardianship of the peculiar excellences of either." — (Walter Pater: *Style.*)

This again can be disentangled, but one who runs may not read it. It approaches the danger point of getting too much into one sentence. Unlike Jane Austen, who for once at least probably did not know quite what she wanted to say, or Wilde, who went out of his way to be funny, Pater probably felt compelled to assemble all that could possibly go together, but his resources in style were not up to the elaboration

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of his thought. Here then are certain types of lack of sentence unity, and their causes are hinted at: ignorance of what you mean or carelessness in expressing it; seductiveness of irrelevant detail, or the failure to recognize it as irrelevant; more complexity of thought than the normal English sentence will bear. There are other causes and expressions of lack of unity; but in any event, bad unity, or failure to state clearly what a sentence is about, is a great drawback to correctness.

It may be asked, at this point, whether there is any standard of length in the English sentence. The answer must be mainly in the negative. A succession of sentences averaging less than twenty words each would impress the reader as short; averaging more than forty words, as long. Mr. Masefield in his volume on Shakespeare writes exceptionally short sentences. Ruskin furnishes a classical example of very long sentences. Average length, however, counts for nothing; for there are many other considerations making for the good of sentences; and, moreover, it is by variation from any fixed average that sentences are likely to be interesting. Thus, to put the matter very mechanically, Macaulay's sentences are said to average about twenty-three words, but probably not one in a hundred is of exactly that length. It is probably safe to find a reason for any individual sentence below ten words or for an average below fifteen, and, on

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the other hand, for an average above forty and an individual of more than fifty: but such reasons need not be pressed very far or be very subtly formulated.

The foregoing are mainly matters of content; we may now deal with certain matters of context, or structure. Certain of the solecisms that have been instanced, notably the false position of correlatives and modifiers, may be regarded as incoherence, but the term may now be treated in a larger way. Incoherence in sentences is mainly a fault of agreement and position. Some of the stock illustrations are also humorous, as, "This medicine is most efficacious when taken fasting and mixed with an equal quantity of hot water," "To anyone having clothes soiled or stained I will pay a forfeit provided I fail in removing the same," "She wore a diamond pin in her hair which was bought in Paris," "A lady sat threading a needle with a Roman nose," and the like, which are subjects for jest in the more doctrinaire and academic parts of *Punch* and other comic papers. Here are some of a more solemn character, from more elevated literature. The incoherent clauses are italicized:

"We have seen such processions; we understand how many different senses, *and how lightly*, various spectators may put on them; how little definite meaning they may have even for those who officiate in them. Here, at least, there was the image itself, *in that age*, with its close con-

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nexion between religion and art, *presumably fair.*" — (Pater: *The Myth of Demeter and Persephone. Greek Studies*, p. 125.)

"The temple itself was probably thrown down by a renewal of the volcanic disturbances; the statues however remaining, and the ministers and worshippers still continuing to make shift for their sacred business in the place, now doubly venerable, but with its temple unrestored, *down to the second or third century of the Christian era*, its frequenters being now perhaps mere chance comers, the family of the original donors having become extinct, or having deserted it." — (*Ibid.* p. 145.)

"Forty years ago, there was assuredly no spot of ground, *out of Palestine, in all the round world*, on which, if you knew, even but a little, the true course of that world's history, you saw with so much joyful reverence the dawn of morning, as at the foot of the Tower of Giotto." — (Ruskin: *Mornings in Florence.* Quoted by Hill, *Rhetoric*, p. 180.)

"Owen, hovering betwixt his respect for his patron, and his love for the youth he had dandled on his knee in childhood, *like the timorous, yet anxious ally of an invaded nation*, endeavoured at every blunder I made to explain my no-meaning." — (Scott: *Rob Roy.* Quoted by Hill, *Rhetoric*, p. 182.)

The word-shaker nods; and his readers have to rub their eyes. He has slumbered many times

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in the course of English literature and on many humbler occasions; wrestling with a tangled web of thought or wishing to say something really nice, he has written English as if it were a foreign language, instead of being a simple, straightforward thing, if one would only take it so. Of course we all understand the foregoing passages well enough — until we try to see what they mean.

It is impossible, within the limits of this chapter, to give any full description of this subtle vice of incoherence. The slips are probably much more frequent than those arising from lack of unity. On the other hand, incoherence results less frequently in positive obscurity; for in the instances cited, and in nearly all others, one may usually see what the writer is driving at. But one has always to be on the watch against the fault. As a precautionary measure, the use of the periodic sentence (*i. e.*, the sentence in which the grammatical structure is not complete until the period, *e. g.*, the present sentence), is, within certain limits, advisable. In the periodic sentence, one has to be rather more observant of the placing of subordinate clauses than if he writes a loose sentence, stringing out clause after clause, beyond the grammatical limits of the sentence, as is done in this sentence, it being an example set by Pater in the second of the sentences quoted above, from him; for all sentences may be regarded as loose when they are

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not periodic. Loose sentences may, of course, be constructed with much skill if the writer will be at pains to save the end clauses for important ideas and to make the grammatical connection as firm as possible. The balanced sentence, again, that is, the sentence in which ideas of equivalent value are put into similar constructions, is a help to coherence. Thus the following ragamuffin of a sentence can be dressed in a variety of presentable ways that will give to the last three predications about the subject similar values:

"The Lake of Lucerne is nearly cruciform in shape (query: in what else than shape?), its length is about twenty-three miles, width varies from one half to two miles, and its greatest depth being seven hundred feet."

These points may not be pressed very far or in a mechanical way. No rule exists for the comparative prevalence of sentences of any one type, but a fair proportion of periodic to loose sentences is said to be three to one. The effect of a succession of loose sentences may vary from not disagreeable informality to slovenliness. A great many periodic sentences following one another without the relief of looseness are likely to be formal and stiff; they may call to mind Mark Twain's description of the German sentence: "Whenever the literary German dives into a sentence, that is the last you are going to see of him till he emerges on the other side of the Atlantic with his verb in his mouth." — (*A Con-*

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*necticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Chap. 22.) Balanced sentences pressed too far easily crowd into antithesis, and antithesis may in turn squeeze and suffocate even the shadow of truth.

The subject of correctness in word and sentence combination may not be dismissed without reference to certain conventions of composition. Conventions are simply common practices, often of a local character, often widely accepted, that have arisen for convenience. Of any one of them about all that we can ordinarily say is, "This is the way the thing is usually done." It is easier to conform than not. Some of the more important conventions may be spoken of. It is customary, in letters, for example, and in other forms of direct address, to treat with profound respect judges, editors of newspapers, and other very important people, and to observe fairly rigid forms of varying degrees of stiffness in addressing all correspondents. Here usage differs somewhat in different localities; forms are not infrequently modified to meet the needs of the typist's manifolding and copying from dictation; there is surely a tendency away from the extreme formality of earlier days. Spelling is another convention wherein custom in English-speaking countries differs somewhat; the differences, as between *favor* and *favour*, for example, *program* and *programme*, *jail* and *gaol*, are of very little importance. The best practice is surely to follow the custom of the country, which practically

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means that a writer leaves spelling to the typesetter without perturbation or lamentation for lost letters. Bad spelling, that is, spelling in which no system is followed, — British, American, "neo-American," "simplified," "reformed," "phonetic," or what not, — is of course highly deplorable. Of capitalization much the same may be said: usage differs slightly as regards the classes of words that we conventionally capitalize; and, on the whole, the tendency is to decrease the classes of words that must be written with large letters. As with spelling, the reason for observing one convention rather than another is that, when once it is learned, the effort spent in following it is less than the risk of hurting that type of reader who is more responsive to correctness than to ideas, just as on many occasions it is better to wear evening dress than not. No logical case can be made out for capitals, except the capital at the beginning of a sentence, which helps out the preceding period; and that at the beginning of every line of poetry, to show that it is poetry. I, O, proper names, proper adjectives, etc., are capitalized merely because we are used to seeing them in capitals; it looks odd, for example, to see William James in one of his latest volumes, writing *french, baconian, english.*

Much more important than spelling and capitalization, so far as composition and style are concerned, is punctuation; for punctuation may be

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so misused as to distort, or even actually to reverse, the meaning of a sentence — a result nearly impossible with the conventions already spoken of. Important, however, as is punctuation, misuses of the marks of punctuation probably cause less actual distress than bad spelling or inferior grammar. At all events spelling is much more insisted on, and much more time is given to the inculcation of it than to punctuation. Spelling is, of course, in one sense, easier to teach; for though there are in English numerous difficult words to spell, learning them rests largely on pertinacity, memory, and habit; whereas the conventions of punctuation, though fairly exact, require fresh application to new pieces of writing and call for constant exercise of both knowledge and judgment. The general rule for punctuation — having mastered the significance of the marks — is to omit no sign where ambiguity or obscurity is likely to arise from such omission.

Before leaving the subject of conventions one other kind may be spoken of — conventions of tone. These are best illustrated by that form of discourse or language which is called "parliamentary." This is a different thing from the conventions of address already spoken of and it amounts to much more than the interpolation of a reasonable number of such phrases as "sir," "the right hon. leader of the opposition," "my esteemed colleague from Montana," " the Robinsonian professor of sacred theology," and all the

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other paraphernalia of address and reference common to debating clubs and committee meetings. It consists rather in general correspondence of mind and expression — the absence of personality, bitterness, rancor, and the presence of those amenities that turn away wrath. Not that one should always desire to turn away wrath; but the theory is, normally, that every rock of offence should, if possible, be removed, to the end that relevant matters may have a free field. The same theory may be applied to the business world and is, indeed, so applied by the sagest of operators, resulting not infrequently, in its excess and when unaccompanied by moral qualities, in what is called in slang phrase, a "smooth proposition," or a "slick citizen." In literature, especially in criticism — that begetter of strife — we see urbanity best exemplified in such writers as Addison and Arnold, and, to name one of many moderns, Mr. A. J. Balfour. More could be said about this aspect of convention; it is indeed a very interesting one. It is often at odds with the plain speaking of the natural man, and is perhaps less a mark of individual vigor than of a certain stage of civilization. It may tend to fall into indifference or complacency, but at its best, when it is more than a mere form, it originates in that charity which thinketh no evil.

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# CHAPTER VIII

## STYLE: ECONOMY AND INCREMENT

THE avoidance of barbarisms, improprieties, and solecisms, of bad unity and of incoherence, and the observance of certain conventions of form and tone, will probably result in "correct" writing. But such correct writing will not necessarily be interesting or forcible or valuable. Qualities of more positive kind are desirable. These may be personal, or intellectual, or imaginative; may depend, in other words, on the "virtue" of the writer or the importance and interest of his subject and its accord with current notions of value; or they may be stylistic. All but the last are outside the scope of the present discussion. With regard to the stylistic aspect of the matter, the positive aim is to coax all expression to approach the maximum of meaning and of movement. From this point of view, words combined into sentences may most conveniently be treated with regard to number, kind, and place. When you employ few words instead of many, when you choose words that will do as much work as possible, when you place them so that they will operate to the best advantage, you



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naturally tend to get more out of the combination; it takes fewer words to mean the same thing, and the result is a simpler and swifter movement.

Number of words may first be treated in a negative way by cutting out superfluous words. The following sentences are correct enough:

1. "Cricket is one of the most enjoyable of games and it is a great pleasure to play it."

2. "It is also told of Strafford that before reading any book for the first time, he would call for a sheet of paper, and then proceed to write down upon it some sketch of the ideas that he already had upon the subject of the book, and of the questions that he expected to find answered."

3. "Yesterday I spent an hour watching children at play on 125th Street. They were poor, ragged, and dirty, but nevertheless were enjoying themselves. One particular group of three little boys were playing with a little wagon. Finally they succeeded in breaking it, and each tot took a portion of it. At this point I spoke to the children. The littlest one immediately began to retreat. The oldest child offered me his part of the toy and asked me to fix if for him. The third child was instantly antagonistic, and volunteered to throw a wheel at me. Then I began to wonder why these children should respond in such a different way. Even before they had spoken, I expected each individual to

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act as he did, and I concluded that the cause was due to the original make-up of each one and to his own natural tendencies. No matter what situation might arise, these children would always be shy, good-natured, and antagonistic."

Though reasonably correct, all the foregoing are evidently redundant in various ways; they use too many words. They could be said as follows:

1. "Cricket is very enjoyable."

Herein you cut out the absolute repetition of the idea in the last clause, a form of redundancy known technically as *tautology*, and suppress the tautological suggestion in the word *game*.

2. "Strafford, before reading any book, would write some sketch of the ideas that he had upon the subject, and of the questions that he expected to find answered."

Herein you cut out words and phrases which add nothing to the meaning, — except possibly by way of picturesqueness and the necessity of going slowly enough to let the reader take in the thought. The technical fault is called *pleonasm;* but it could about as handily be classified as *prolixity*, that is, the use of unimportant details.

3. "After watching some street Arabs at play for about an hour yesterday, I spoke to three little boys who had just broken a toy wagon and were dividing its fragments. The effect was interesting. The littlest ran away; the oldest asked me to mend his toy; the third threatened

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to shy his at me. I had watched them long enough to expect each to act in the way he did, and I suppose that in any situation the children will be shy, good-natured, and antagonistic."

Herein is an example of a *verbose* passage, that has to be pruned and recast, and generally rewritten before it is in any form for consumption.

It is not particularly important to bear in mind such terms as "tautology," "pleonasm," "verbosity," "prolixity," "circumlocution," and others which stand for specific kinds of redundancy — unless such terms help one to keep his eye open for the faults. As a matter of fact, no strict classification of the forms of redundancy is at all possible: wordiness crops up in all manner of subtlety and rankness, — from long passages that have, like the third above, totally to be recast, to little annoying redundancies like the following: *present writer* for *I*, *win out*, *divide up*, *have got*, *universal panacea*, *somewhat unique*, *bold and audacious*, *recalled back*, *funeral obsequies*, *intolerable to be borne*, *play is enjoyed by all*, for, *everybody likes to play*, and other weak, passive constructions; and countless others of various kinds. For such faults the well-known tendency of English style to double words (p. 215) is partly responsible, founding such phrases as *prominent and leading* on the analogy of the more idiomatic, traditional, and justifiable doublings, such as *let or hindrance*, *kith and kin;* and it is partly due, in all probability, to the wide

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employment of various mechanical appliances for producing "copy" and print and the multiplication of occasions, which have enabled words to win in the struggle with ideas, just as guns are said to have the best of armor plate. But in rhetorical matters there is small object in speculating on causes; a strong effort in writing should be directed to cutting out superfluous words and to uprooting unimportant ideas and the linguistic weeds along with them. De Quincey's advice, in his *Style*, is well known, though he himself did not always follow it:

"Simply to retrench one word from each sentence, one superfluous epithet, for example, would probably increase the disposable time of the public by one-twelfth part; in other words, would add another month to the year, or raise the sum of volumes read from eleven to twelve hundred. A mechanic operation would affect *that* change; but, by cultivating a closer logic and more severe habits of thinking, perhaps two sentences out of each three might be pruned away, and the amount of possible publication might be thus increased in a threefold degree."

Though the ideal is a good one, it is also obvious that most of us do not spend all our time in reading; that many of us cannot take in more than a moderate quantity of ideas in any form in a given time; that a large number of readers thrive on plethora, — just as a good ration is not too concentrated but gives a feeling of full-

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ness; that buyers like to get their money's worth in pages; that, in the words of Lord Morley, "no writer can now expect to attain the widest popularity as a man of letters unless he gives to the world *multa* as well as *multum*." But it would be nice if most books — novels, histories, scientific books, sermons, essays — *could* be a little shorter.

There is, however, the opposing, if less common, sin of using too few words. The want is more common among untrained than among practiced writers. Aside from leaving out facts, situations, and explanations that are necessary to coherence, there are often little stylistic omissions. For example, the following is not obscure, but is somewhat inexact:

"Aided by the valuable commentaries of Huxley, Tyndall, and Spencer, Evolution gained numerous converts, until, at present, it is accepted pretty generally as the true descent of man by the learned men of all countries."

Here the writer means, "— the theory (or doctrine) of evolution gained numerous converts, until, at present, it is accepted pretty generally by the leaned men of all countries as giving the true account of the descent of man."

The following sentence is positively obscure through excessive shortness:

"Thinking the whole matter over carefully, it seems to me that the political geography of Africa compares very favorably with that of

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America in about 1750." The baffling phrase is "compares very favorably." It should be cleared by substitution or by expansion.

So much for the negative aspects of the matter. In a more positive way the aspect of style which we are now considering may be regarded as economy of predication. Writing is words in a series of predications, or things said (objects, in grammatical terms) about other things (subjects). The application of this economy of predication to writing will be clearer by reference to the ordinary grammatical classifications of sentences. There are (1) simple sentences, or sentences with one subject and one predicate (*e. g.*, "He will arrive in due time"), with necessary modifiers; (2) compound sentences, that is, sentences composed of at least two simple sentences connected by a coördinate conjunction, as *and* or *but* (*e. g.*, "He ran and I followed him"); (3) complex sentences, to wit, those which contain one principal predication and one or more subordinate or modifying predications (*e. g.*, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him"); and (4) compound-complex sentences, in which either or both or all of the principal predications have one or more than one modifying predication (*e. g.*, the present sentence). Simple sentences or simple compound sentences are evidently much used by children and are very valuable in all matters, such as telegraphic dispatches, where directness and simplicity are essential to

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clearness. But no style can hope to be very exact that does not use subordinate clauses to state relations that are of a more intricate character than can be expressed invariably by *and* or *but*. It may be remarked incidentally that any succession of similar kinds of sentences produces very different effects of rhythm from successions of another sort. Thus a succession of simple sentences is choppy and sententious, as with Macaulay, Emerson, and J. R. Green; compound sentences are liable to drag; sentences with subordinate clauses, unless used with skill, tend to looseness. The ability to use complex grammatical units, is, indeed, one of the great tests of writing, and it may be remarked that the invention of the complex sentence was a great step in the economy of style.

Thus one may say, "I ran after him and tried to catch him but I did not succeed; and he ran around the corner, and there was a great crowd in the street, but I could not find him in it." Such crudity is probably extreme; even a tyro would be more likely to say, "Following him, I tried to catch him, but did not succeed; for he ran round the corner where there was a large crowd, in which I could not find him." Still redundant, this is much better than the first version, for the reason that the subordinate clauses make the relation of the thought more exact, and the suppression of "I followed him" into "following him" is a great gain in variety.

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But referring to the foregoing discussion of redundancy, we can evidently say, as one of several forms, "Though I ran, I did not catch him; for he vanished around the corner into a large crowd." What happens is this: in a wholly right way, you make the phrase "did not catch" stand for the original "tried to catch" and "did not succeed in this" — one particular for two; and you also make the one particular after "for" in the last version stand for three original particulars; one does not need to predicate the existence of a large crowd, it being assumed in the phrase "a large crowd."

The instance is extremely simple, but the principle underlying it is of the greatest importance in the economy of writing. To put the matter on a more actual footing let us take a good sound passage, noting how the italicized words and phrases take the place of whole predications, of subordinate clauses, and of phrases:

"Experience is a process that continually gives us new material to digest. We handle this intellectually by *the mass of beliefs* of which we find ourselves already possessed, assimilating, rejecting, or rearranging in different degrees. Some of the apperceiving ideas are *recent acquisitions* of our own, but most of them are *common-sense traditions* of the race. There is probably not a common-sense tradition, of all those which we now live by, that was not in the first instance *a genuine discovery*, an inductive generalization

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like those more recent ones of the atom, of inertia, of energy, of reflex action, or of fitness to survive. The notions of one Time and of one Space as *single continuous receptacles; the distinction between thoughts and things*, matter and mind; between permanent subjects and changing attributes; *the conception of classes* with sub-classes within them; *the separation of fortuitous* from regularly caused connections; surely all these were *once definite conquests* made at historic dates by our ancestors *in their attempts* to get the chaos of their crude individual experiences into a *more shareable and manageable* shape. They proved *of such sovereign use as* DENKMITTEL that they are now a part of the very structure of our mind. We cannot play fast and loose with them. No experience can upset them. On the contrary, they apperceive every experience and assign it to its place." — (William James: *The Meaning of Truth*, p. 61.)

Passages with much greater repression of predication may easily be found, as in Gibbon's sentence: "The winding channel through which the waters of the Euxine flow with a rapid and incessant course towards the Mediterranean received the appellation of Bosphorus, a name not less celebrated in history than in the fables of antiquity." Provided you wish to give the information at all, the words — for example, "winding," "with a rapid and incessant course," "towards the Mediterranean," and others — tell

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us what a less experienced writer might have expended whole clauses and even sentences in stating. But the James passage stands for a more average, varied, and hence "actual" use of the stylistic device. It is part and parcel of the "common-sense tradition" of good writing.

Akin to economy of predication is the *kind* of word, the second subject for discussion. Somewhat as a word may be made to do the work of a clause or a sentence, so one word may do more work and better work than another. On this fact is based much criticism and revision of style. The principle may be illustrated by examples of several grades.

In the first place, short and simple words may be used for long words and phrases. Thus, instead of the foregoing sentence, I may say, without affectation, "In the first instance short words and simple language may be substituted for more elaborate phraseology." But since the simpler form is also shorter by twenty-three letters, it is better; any difference in meaning between the two is not worth bothering about. Cases there are, doubtless, where words of a prevailing quality have a good deal of effect on style, as every one may see by comparing, say, Swift with Johnson; but these are usually significant of nothing more than personal habit and taste. Of two words about equally good in stating an idea, the shorter is the more economical; that is about the only rule. Etymology has

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little to do with the matter, and all attempts to claim for a good style a certain proportion of words of "native" origin or of Latin derivation may be dismissed as arbitrary. The affected and deliberate use of large, long, pompous words, where simple words would suffice, the habit known as "fine-writing," is to be strictly condemned.

Gain is also made in style by the use of specific words for general words. The specific word tends to represent the object, action, or quality much more exactly than the general word, which stands for the class or *genus* within which the object is or the action takes place. For example, "I talked with the doctor," and "I slipped the hound" are more specific than "I met the man," and "I released the animal." The former are hence preferable, that is, they do the necessary work better; they tell us a good deal more: the doctor, for example, is not only a doctor but also a man (or a woman), and to talk with a man you must also, barring telephones, meet him. If, however, the man is not a doctor but an undertaker, or the animal a cow, to specify the fact in such cases as these, is of advantage both to professional and business interests. Since specific words do the work of general words, and more besides, the safe rule is to use the most specific words that will stand for your meaning.

But it is evident that the general word also is often a great saver. If we always had to speak

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of particular objects and actions, we should seldom get anywhere. Thus a phrase like *personal effects* may conveniently take the place of six pairs of trousers, three waistcoats, four coats, eleven shirts, and various other "articles of personal use and adornment," as the customs officers call them. General words are also useful in giving variety, after the specific image is well set up. Thus, "The hound had caught its head in the bars of the wicket. The master released the animal," etc. Clearly there is no object in specifying all the details again. These lumping terms are hence indispensable; whoever, in remote ages, first hit upon them was one of the colossal, though nameless, benefactors of mankind: without his device, there could be no Home University Library, for example. But general terms are, on the whole, not so interesting as specific words; hence you will note in novels and other books designed to enthrall, a tendency to use specific words. "After many vicissitudes he married his heart's desire," is the sum and substance of many stories, but this general predication has to be expanded into ten thousand or eighty thousand words of pleasing particular detail to be marketable. It should, however, be noted that the tendency to be excessively specific not infrequently results in triviality and hectoring phraseology.

What is wanted is the definite word as opposed to the vague or ambiguous word. This is really

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a matter of correctness. A word may be specific or general and still be definite, though the chances of definiteness are usually in favor of specific words. A word is likely to be definite in proportion as the objects which it names are clearly apprehended — its denotation, to use a term of logic, by decrease in extent is likely to be more exact in content. It is perhaps simpler to say that definite words are words that are understood, exactly rather than emotionally, as the writer intends them to be understood. But it is therefore evident that definiteness varies with different classes of subjects and with different audiences. For common, practical purposes water, salt water, fresh water, soft water, hard water, etc., are definite enough, whereas they may be totally useless and vague in, say, chemistry. Hence arise technical words. Hence writers who wish to be precise are often at pains to define the denotation of a term with such exactness that vagueness and ambiguity shall have little chance.

From this point of view another objection besides that of "incorrectness" is urged against slang, exaggerated, superlative, and euphemistic or "fine," expression. Fine writing is not only wordy but is also vague. Exaggerated and superlative phrases — *rushed madly, perfectly heavenly, a man in a thousand,* and the like — leave nothing for those occasions when the phrases might be really definite. All these expressions, and slang

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in some of its aspects, err in trying to get more out of a word than ordinary usage ever tried to put into it.

From the foregoing point of view there is, then, no excuse for anything but accuracy. But there is another class of words where the aim is not precision but expressiveness; the gain in economy is made in a different way, — not by exactness or simplicity or shortness, but by suggestion. The most familiar words of this class are called "figures of speech" or "tropes," because they turn the word from a literal to a figurative meaning. Scores of tropes have been recognized, illustrated, and classified, but it is very doubtful if so complete an analysis of them as one finds in, say, Bain's *Rhetoric*, is of any practical value in composition. Most tropes we use unconsciously and by long force of habit: we let a part stand for a whole (*synecdoche*) as *sail* for *ship*, "some village Hampden," *below stairs;* or an agent or accompaniment stand for the literal fact (*metonymy*), as the *bench*, for the judges on the bench, the *bar*, *Wall Street*, *Downing Street*, *Lombard Street*, *Wilhelmstrasse;* or we endow inanimate objects and abstract terms with qualities of a lively sort (*Personification*), as "Let not Ambition mock their useful toil," "Every man expects England to do his duty," etc.; or we state the reverse of what we mean (*irony*), as "a pretty kettle of fish"; or we exaggerate for rhetorical effect (*hyperbole*), as commonly; or we do a

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great many other things without knowing it, or, in an access of imitation, emotion, or desire "to write better than we can." The most important and worthy figures are *simile* and *metaphor*, the operation of which is less a matter of shortening or emphasis than the suggestion of other things than those contained in the literal meaning of the word or phrase. Simile states a comparison, specifying the point to be suggested, as, "be ye wise as serpents"; metaphor implies the point of comparison, as, "be ye serpents," which instance, of course, is not a successful metaphor, because it fails to suggest the special serpentine quality that is desired. Hence metaphor, though more effective than simile, has to be helped out by context, if it is not to be confined to that large group of ancient figures of speech represented by *social lions, clinging vines, frail flowers, gilded youth*, etc. Metaphors and similes are about the only figures of speech to which special heed should be given; for the others will ordinarily take care of themselves. Figures do much to liven discourse, but are likely to err, if at all, by reason of staleness and inconsistency, or through suggestion of the wrong thing. In the last category we find the celebrated "mixed" metaphor, that source of popular literary jest — "looking backward into the mists of futurity," "he never opened his mouth without putting his foot in it," and the scores of others that will occur to any one. Vigor of style is, however,

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more nearly proportioned to metaphorical skill than to any other one thing; for metaphors are the stock-in-trade, or backbone, or *sine qua non*, or what not, of clever and individual sayings. A man may be said to be measured by his metaphors. Every day new ones are turning up, and some of them stick, — "the glass of fashion and the mould of form," "a place in the sun," "naked theft," and many others.

So far as the movement of sentences is aided by the placing of words, the matter is largely one of coherence, which has already been spoken of (p. 168). A coherent sentence usually offers little resistance to free movement. There is, however, a principle of emphasis which tends to contravene coherence. A normal English sentence proceeds from subject to predicate with the necessary modifiers strung along in proper places. This normal order is not infrequently dislocated for the sake of throwing an important idea into prominence; Carlyle's works are the great storehouse of such emphasis. Now as Professor Wendell has pointed out (*English Composition*, Chap. III), the most conspicuous places in any sentence are the beginning and the ending, because the eye more naturally lights on these places; the interior is less observable. The matter may be briefly illustrated: A succession of short, simple statements, — *e. g.*, "I came, I saw, I conquered," — however punctuated, is of itself emphatic, and no dislocation is possible.

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With complex and compound-complex sentences the case is different. Here is a sentence, unified and coherent enough, that has, on the contrary, no special emphasis:

1. "A newspaper can do much to influence a person's taste for good or bad literature."

More emphasis may be gained by the following revision, of a pretty obvious kind:

2. "A person's tastes for good or bad literature a newspaper can do much to influence."

Let us now make the sentence dreadfully emphatic, so emphatic that the figure of irony is suggested:

3. "Much influence a newspaper can have on a person's literary tastes."

Three facts or principles may be in general noted with regard to emphasis: (1) It not only affects the salience of certain ideas, but it also may actually change the meaning, as in the last revision above. Hence emphasis must be used judiciously. (2) When, especially in intricate sentences, you decrease predication (p. 182) you tend to increase emphasis. (3) The periodic sentence is likely to be more emphatic than the loose sentence; not only is more care likely to be spent on its construction, but the main idea is likely to be held till the last. Thus the Spencer-Whately classical example of an extremely "indirect" sentence—"We came to our journey's end, at last, with no small difficulty, after much fatigue, through deep roads and bad weather"

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— is clearly much less emphatic than Spencer's final revision of it (*The Philosophy of Style*): "At last, with no small difficulty, and after much fatigue, we came, through deep roads and bad weather, to our journey's end."

Emphasis, as well as coherence, rests also on what may be called attraction. If you "bunch" phrases, like hits in baseball, more runs will result, style will make a better score. "Bunching" is a matter of juxtaposition. In the following passage, the simple, "indirect" order is somewhat dislocated, and the words standing for similar or identical ideas are brought pretty well together, but not so closely as to twist the style out of shape. The words and phrases in question are in italics:

" — I have before now noticed Mr. Roebuck's stock argument for proving the greatness and happiness of England as she is, and for quite stopping the mouths of all gainsayers. Mr. Roebuck is never weary of reiterating this argument of his, so I do not know why I should be weary of noticing it. 'May not every man in England say what he likes?' — Mr. Roebuck perpetually asks; and *that*, he thinks, is quite sufficient, and *when every man may say what he likes, our aspirations ought to be satisfied. But the aspirations of culture*, which is the study of perfection, *are not satisfied*, unless what men say, when they may say what they like, is worth saying, — has good in it, and more good than

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bad. *In the same way* the 'Times,' replying to some foreign strictures on the dress, looks, and behaviour of the English abroad, urges that the English ideal is that every one should be free to do and to look just as he likes. But culture indefatigably tries, not to make what each raw person may like the rule by which he fashions himself; but to draw ever nearer to a sense of what is indeed beautiful, graceful, and becoming, and to get the raw person to like that."—(Arnold: *Culture and Anarchy*, Chap. I.)

The foregoing is by no means extreme, though skilful; more rugged and constant dislocations you will find in Carlyle and De Quincey, of whom the latter was especially fond of groupings. The matter is important to movement; to make it clearer, read the following passage, hit upon at random in opening a book by one of our best moderns — (H. G. Wells: *The New Machiavelli*, p. 163.)

"My uncle has been the clue to a great number of men for me. He was an illuminating extreme. I have learnt what not to expect from them through him, and to comprehend resentments and dangerous sudden antagonisms I should have found incomprehensible in their more complex forms, if I had not first seen them in him in their feral state."

Note how the passage may be improved simply by shifting a phrase or two (italicized) without other alteration:

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"My uncle has been *for me* the clue to a great number of men. He was an illuminating extreme. *Through him* I have learnt what not to expect from them, and to comprehend resentments and dangerous sudden antagonisms [query: — *which* needed for ease?] I should have found incomprehensible in their more complex forms, if I had not first seen them in their feral state *in him*."

The last sentence is a pretty tough one at best. The addition of a *which* before *I should* would evidently enable other clauses — "in their more complex forms" and "if I had not," etc. — to be shifted so as to get a great deal more work out of them. Grouping, then, is a very interesting point to which attention may be directed.

There is of emphasis, as of coherence in a lesser degree, another aspect which depends on rhythm and harmony. Such matters constitute the third aspect of style; they regard what may be called pure movement; and to this a separate chapter will now be given.

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# CHAPTER IX

## STYLE: PURE MOVEMENT

WRITING may be correct, vigorous, and interesting without, however, being very agreeable. It is likely to be more agreeable if correct than incorrect, if vigorous than dead. But other matters of style remain to be treated, matters, so to speak, of pure movement, — variety, tone, harmony, and the like. These may be regarded as polish, gloss, lubrication, mechanical efficiency, diffused beauty, or what not. Over and above the maximum of meaning, these matters stand for a superimposed and technical virtue.

The first two, variety and tone, are simple enough in principle. Precepts regarding them are pretty well conventionalized. We are constantly told to avoid monotony in wording and in sentence form; "the one rule," says Stevenson, "is to be infinitely various." Thus a long succession of periodic sentences (see page 170) is likely to become monotonous through constant formality; an array of successive loose sentences suggests slovenliness; long sentences are likely to drag; short, declarative sentences, to vex



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one by too much choppiness; many questions, to create wonder as to how the writer will answer them all. Even at some risk of obscurity, writers often try to vary their wording by the use of synonyms, circumlocutions, and the like, to avoid a repetition of the same words and phrases or the same form and rhythm of sentences. Lord Morley tells us of Comte, — in a passage which speaks of other technical matters as well, — that when he "took pains to prevent any sentence from exceeding two lines of his manuscript or five of print; to restrict every paragraph to seven sentences; to exclude every hiatus between two sentences, or even between two paragraphs; and never to reproduce any word, except the auxiliary monosyllables, in two consecutive sentences; he justified his literary solicitude by insisting on the wholesomeness alike to heart and intelligence of submission to artificial institutions. He felt, after he had once mastered the habit of the new yoke, that it became the source of continual and unforeseeable improvements even in thought, and he perceived that the reason why verse is a higher kind of literary perfection than prose, is that verse imposes a greater number of rigorous forms." (*Macaulay.*)

That is to say, Comte agreed with himself not to do certain things; he arrayed a series of *dont's, exclusiones debitae gustibus.* The practice, for the reasons given, and also because it helps to prevent monotony, is probably sound.

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On the other hand, we find careful writers engaging in deliberate repetition. Arnold supplies the best examples: having selected phrases that pleased him, — "to make reason and the will of God prevail," "conduct is three-fourths of life," "the qualities of regularity, uniformity, precision, balance," "sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true," and many such, — he proceeded to rub them into his reader or to impale his discourse upon them, as may be illustrated by the following passage from *Culture and Anarchy:*

"The pursuit of perfection, then, is the pursuit of sweetness and light. He who works for sweetness and light, works to make reason and the will of God prevail. He who works for machinery, he who works for hatred, works only for confusion. Culture looks beyond machinery, culture hates hatred; culture has one great passion, the passion for sweetness and light. It has one even yet greater! — the passion for making them *prevail.* It is not satisfied till we *all* come to a perfect man; it knows that the sweetness and light of the few must be imperfect until the raw and unkindled masses of humanity are touched with sweetness and light. If I have not shrunk from saying that we must work for sweetness and light, so neither have I shrunk from saying that we must have a broad basis, must have sweetness and light for as many as possible," and so on; seven "sweetness and lights," in fourteen lines,

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and other repetitions in proportion. Comte, for example, would not have used the second *shrunk* in the last sentence; it would be interesting to rewrite the passage according to Comte's rules. Here are extremes of deliberate variety and deliberate repetition, both tending to make style easier to read.

Unmitigated variety may possibly become a nuisance, and the check upon it is not merely obvious repetition of important words, but another kind of thing — uniformity of tone. This is sufficiently vague. But if we revert to our classes of words (p. 158) we shall see that uniformity is, in one sense, keeping within the limits of kind. Thus the preacher who, in an otherwise simple and respectful address to the Lord, prayed Him to "bless those poor heathen who walk in darkness with prognathous jaws," outstepped his kind and his construction. Thus, on the other hand, lawyers, doctors, and other professional men, often have difficulty in foregoing, even in personal relations, the tone of their calling, and the popular lecturer, or the chairman, or the druggist, may glimmer through household talk; they would all do well to read the essays of Montaigne. Tone, again, is regulated by point of view, by occasion, by audience, and we have seen (p. 174) how alleged necessities of address, as in debate, call for a uniformity of attitude and manner. Tone is often a deliberate assumption of attitude, which, on

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its worse side, may degenerate into pose. Hence one may be pervasively friendly, or indignant, or bland, or may address Sunday-schools with becoming condescension. Tone is also not infrequently a matter of moral quality, and here again no rules can be applied. Practice and observation are the best schools, and with that remark we must be content.

The third matter, harmony, is largely technical and may be treated at some length. It is worthy of much attention, for it is the most conspicuous and important point at which style may be regarded as something apart from the instrument of sense. We have all more positive ideas about "harmonious numbers" in poetry than in prose; and accordingly it will be convenient to note certain distinctions between verse and prose in order to see how nearly and with what advantage the latter may approach the dividing line, still remaining prose. Regarding verse in a very general way, we may note that it is always distinguished by the presence of metrical feet of various kinds, such as dactyls, iambs, etc. Several of these feet, usually not less than two or more than seven, and most commonly four or five, constitute a line of verse. Two such similar lines may constitute a complete poem, or, on the other hand, a poem may comprise hundreds and thousands of similar or locally differing lines. The main fact is the recurring of groups of sound of about the same metrical value. There is

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plenty of variation in the accent and there are feet of exceptional shortness or length; but there is also a prevailing regular beat which is not at variance with the natural accent of words or the desired emphasis of them.

Such lines may depend solely on their meter to distinguish them from prose — in which case we have blank verse, that very difficult form, difficult chiefly because all its eggs are in the basket of rhythm. Or they may be bound together by end-rime into couplets or stanzas of various complexity. The binding may be aided by alliteration and assonance. The former of these is the recurrence of the same consonantal sounds, usually at the beginnings of words, as in Swinburne's

The *l*isp of *l*eaves and the *r*ipple of *r*ain,

or internally and medially and terminally, as in Keats's

*Season* of *mists* and *mellow fruitfulness.*

Assonance is the recurrence of the same vowel sounds where the circumjacent consonants are of different quality: thus *tame* and *mane*, *fit* and *rill*, are assonant. Assonance, on rare occasions, takes the place of true rime, in which, as we have seen, at least one vowel and one consonant are of the same tone-quality in the riming words.

Among the different vowel and consonantal

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sounds some are more agreeable than others. If proof were needed of this assertion, it may be seen in the fact that the major concern in the education of certain people is to say all sounds without squack, twang, or nasality, and to open and round out vowel sounds with agreeable intonation; singers notably prefer some vowels to others. Open and broad vowels are usually thought to be better than close, flat ones; the consonants *p*, *b*, *f*, *v*, *l*, *m*, *n*, to be more agreeable in sound than *k*, *s*, *g*, *t*, and other harder sounds. Softness of speech sounds is in a manner transferred to reading prose. Alliteration and assonance, which tend to use the more agreeable sounds and to avoid the recurrence of harsher and flatter consonants and vowels, evidently work toward the smoothness of verse.

Apply this necessarily brief account of verse to the matter under discussion, and it is evident that prose should avoid any recurrence of the metrical foot. If the distinction between prose and verse amounts to anything, is not merely academic, it amounts to saying that the presence of regular, recurring metrical feet is out of place in prose; or, in other words, that writing in which the trick appears is not prose at all, however it be spaced. The following passage, for example, would be abominable prose, except that it is not prose but lame verse; it is from a book, Blackmore's *Lorna Doone*, full of such vicious passages:

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"'Nay, there is no time,' she answered, glancing at a jewelled timepiece, scarcely larger than an oyster, which she drew from near her waistband; and then she pushed it away in confusion, lest its wealth should startle me." (Chap. LVII.) It may be written as unrimed tetrameter, with a bad fifth line, thus:

> Nay, there is no time, she answered,
> Glancing at a jewelled timepiece,
> Scarcely larger than an oyster,
> Which she drew from near her waistband;
> And then she pushed it away in confusion,
> Lest its wealth should startle me.

Many readers doubtless like this sort of thing; it has been said of it that the soul of the poet cannot be suppressed but must press upward through the prose. Nevertheless it is technically bad.

Prose naturally avoids rime; there is no such temptation to use rimes as there is to fall into spurious meter. Rime in prose is likely to occur in careless jingles, — "Burke's Works," "one wonders," "as the day was terribly chilly and the end of the journey remote he put on his overcoat," "fundamental mental images," "cannot be suppressed but must press," and the like. In these instances prose drops for a moment into the suggestion of verse, and that to a trained ear is disagreeable, as when a canoe strikes a snag.

There is no reason, however, why prose should not employ alliteration and assonance when the

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movement will thereby be made smoother, and this, as a matter of fact, is what often happens. Anything that suggests a jingle or supererogatory pun — *one wonders*, for example — is usually unpleasing; but this is not the case with alliteration and assonance skilfully used. A succession of syllables, beginning, say, with *s* or similar sibilant sounds, or *k* and kindred cacophonous combinations, is not usually in the highest degree agreeable; a little of it sets one's teeth on edge; it is a crude performance of the trick. But such is not the case with the more delicate sounds when varied and alternated and scattered throughout a passage of prose. Ruskin is probably the conspicuous master of this virtue. Take, for example, the following passage, by no means one of his most noteworthy, from *The Stones of Venice*:

"It is the *f*ace of a *m*an, in *m*idd*l*e *l*ife, *f*or there are two *d*eep *f*urrows *r*igh*t* across the *f*ore-hea*d*, *d*ivi*d*ing it *l*ike the *f*ounda*t*ions of a *t*ower; the height of it a*b*ove is *b*oun*d* *b*y the *f*ill*e*t of the *d*uca*l* *c*ap. The rest of the *f*eatures are *s*ingu*l*ar*l*y *s*ma*l*l and de*l*icate, the *l*ips *s*harp, *p*erha*p*s the *s*har*p*ness of death being added to that of the natural lines; but there is a *s*weet *s*mile u*p*on th*e*m, and a dee*p* *s*ere*n*ity u*p*on the whole coun*te*nance."

Compare this with the following revision where the words are used without regard for alliterative value:

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"Two deep lines right across the forehead indicate that the subject was of middle age, and these divide it like the underpinning of a tower [note the obscurity of the clause in the original also]; the height of the face above is girdled by the band of the cap that doges wore. All the other features are uncommonly small and delicate, the lips thin, perhaps the sharpness of death being added to that of the natural lines; but they are smiling pleasantly and the whole expression is one of deep tranquillity."

Such use of consonants is largely a matter of ear; it probably came easy to Ruskin to write thus; certainly it is something of a task to untwist his alliteration. The habit is one that can be cultivated without great difficulty and with some success, if one uses judgment. But a word of caution is necessary. Since the language contains some forty sounds, which are represented by the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, repetition of these sounds is unavoidable in pieces of any length. Hence many pieces that appear to be deliberately alliterative are only accidentally so, and the passages where we can be sure that even a Ruskin went out of his way to use the better sounding word are comparatively rare. It is, notwithstanding, quite proper to try to use agreeable instead of unpleasant repetitions.

But what is prose rhythm? That is really the important question. Alliteration and assonance,

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the choice of nice words, may help to make prose pretty, and they go to help rhythm; but what is prose rhythm as distinguished from what we have seen that it should not be, metrical rhythm? Rhythm is essentially the recurrence of some unit of length and accent, allowing for such slight variations as do not throw one out of the beat. In verse the unit is one or another kind of foot. It is much harder to say what the unit is in prose; but in spoken prose the unit is not improbably determined by what may be uttered comfortably at a breath, and this again is broken into groups of words, or phrases, which go together in sense, as may be verified by reading aloud. In written prose the unit may be measured also by what the eye can easily take at a glance. The presence or the perception of rhythm in prose will, if this assumption be true, vary with the capacity of the speaker or the reader. Thus young children just learning to read, have no sense of rhythm but read word by word; thus on the other hand, the skilful and resonant speaker may fall into a stride or swing or compelling intonation, which, despite anything of value that he has to say, may winnow tears from certain contingents in his audience. Again, narrative dialogue as commonly written has no rhythm; whereas the conversation of Johnson as reported by Boswell carried that quality into the drawing-room. A succession of short sentences, strongly emphasized, is likely,

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from excessive staccato, to smother any real rhythm; and such style is often hectoring.

Now whether this unit of length is dependent or not on capacity of lung or grasp of eye, individual to the speaker or the reader, there is a certain objective aspect of the matter; which is that, of whatever length, the unit is (1) recurrent and, often, (2) balanced, not only internally but also with regard to other units. To make the matter clearer several famous sentences may be cited, which to avoid repetition may be so spaced as to bring out the recurrence of the units and the balances in them:

Every man is not a proper champion
for Truth,
Nor fit to take up the gauntlet
in the cause of Verity. — *Browne.*

He that dwelleth
in the secret place
of the Most High
Shall abide
under the shadow
of the Almighty. — *Psalm* 91.

Or ever the silver cord be loosed,
or the golden bowl be broken,
or the pitcher be broken
at the fountain
or the wheel broken
at the cistern.
Then shall the dust return to the earth
as it was;
And the spirit shall return unto God
who gave it.
— *Ecclesiastes*, 12.

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I cannot praise
a fugitive and cloistered virtue,
unexercised and unbreathed,
that never sallies out
and seeks her adversary,
but slinks out of the race
where that immortal garland
is to be run for
not without dust
and heat. — *Milton.*

O eloquent, just and mighty Death!
whom none could advise,
thou hast persuaded;
what none hath dared,
thou hast done;
and whom all the world hath flattered,
thou only hast cast out of the world
and despised;
Thou hast drawn together
all the far-stretched greatness,
all the pride, cruelty, and ambition
of man,
and hast covered them all over
with these two narrow words,
*Hic jacet.*
— *Raleigh.*

Charity suffereth long
and is kind;
charity envieth not;
charity vaunteth not itself,
is not puffed up,

Doth not behave itself unseemly,
seeketh not its own,
is not easily provoked,
thinketh no evil;

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Rejoiceth not in iniquity,
but rejoiceth in the truth;

Beareth all things,
believeth all things,
hopeth all things,
endureth all things.

Charity never faileth;
but whether there be prophecies,
they shall fail;
whether there be tongues,
they shall cease;
whether there be knowledge,
it shall vanish away.
— II. *Corinthians*, 13.

Clearly these recastings are somewhat hazardous, since there is in prose, unlike verse, no exact finger or foot rule. Yet, granted that the foregoing is a not unwarranted breaking of the passages into units, — other groupings might be better, — several things may be observed. (1) The units in any one passage are of fairly equivalent length, and (2) the units that are balanced against one another are also of about the same size. But (3) there is a general tendency for the latter half of a balance to be prolonged over the first member, and (4) this sometimes means the addition of extra syllables, as in Milton's "and heat," or the closing "away" in the charity passage. (5) Most of these passages are built on the two-member plan, or multiples of two members, but the whole of the Raleigh, in

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a very conspicuous degree, is constructed by various triplets. The charity passage contains both styles. No generalization to the effect that these proportions are representative of prose is of course intended. (6) Each of these units, though varying in length, is easy to say, and the uniformity initiates a swing. The nearest that we can get to any "law" of prose rhythm is to say that in sentences like the foregoing the clauses are not very wide apart in the number of syllables, that they are neither choppy nor cumbrous, and that the succession of units is sufficiently prolonged to set up a suggestion of regularity, which may be and evidently is, varied from paragraph to paragraph and even from sentence to sentence.

To make the matter clearer, let us take a passage in which no rhythm is discernable, a good clear passage, nevertheless, where there is some balance. Rhythmless passages are as a matter of fact rather hard to find among good writers; and indeed a style which appears, to the eye, to be rhythmless, may be so read as to contain some rises and falls.

"Chalk occurs in north-west Ireland; it stretches over a large part of France, — the chalk which underlies Paris being, in fact, a continuation of that of the London basin; it runs through Denmark and Central Europe, and extends southward to North Africa; while eastward, it appears in the Crimea and in Syria, and

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may be traced as far as the shores of the Sea of Aral, in Central Asia." — (Huxley: *On a Piece of Chalk.*)

Evidently it would be somewhat gratuitous to impose "style" on such a plain statement of fact as the foregoing, to treat it *à la* Blackmore, for example. Yet, as a matter of fact, passages totally devoid of some kind of rhythm are not easy to find among competent writers; it appears almost as if a writer, once in possession of any art of writing, would fall into some swing or gait. The following passage from a writer who wrought his prose, for the most part, in intellectual terms, would not be called "rhythmic," but it evidently has rhythm of a kind, obviously not that of the famous passages just quoted.

"This distinction between wit and humour, Coleridge and other kindred critics applied, with much effect, in their studies of some of our older English writers. And as the distinction between imagination and fancy, made popular by Wordsworth, found its best justification in certain essential differences of stuff in Wordsworth's own writings, so this other critical distinction, between wit and humour, finds a sort of visible interpretation and instance in the character and writings of Charles Lamb; — one who lived more consistently than most writers among subtle literary theories, and whose remains are still full of curious interest for the student of litera-

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ture as a fine art." — (Walter Pater: *Charles Lamb.*)

Of nearly all the foregoing passages one special thing should be noted — the tendency to prolong the last unit. This gives to sentences what is called cadence or fall. Cadences are also fallings within a unit or clause, and they presuppose some corresponding rise; for example, "whom none hath advised, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done" illustrates the notion of rise and fall. End cadence is even more common. Here are two passages of good quality, of which the first has little end cadence, and the second tends to prolong the closing clauses:

"Yet hence arises a grave mischief. The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, — the act of thought — is instantly transferred to the record. The poet chanting was felt to be a divine man. Henceforth the chant is divine also. The writer was a just and wise spirit. Henceforth it is settled, the book is perfect; as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. Instantly the book becomes noxious. The guide is a tyrant. We sought a brother, and lo, a governor. The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, slow to open to the incursions of Reason, having once so opened, having once received this book, stands upon it, and makes an outcry if it is disparaged. Colleges are built on it. Books are written on it by thinkers, not by

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Man Thinking; by men of talent, that is, who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles. Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given; forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries when they wrote these books." — (Emerson: *The American Scholar.*)

"It was past noon of a day brightened with the clear sunlight of an American midsummer when the forces of Braddock began for a second time to cross the Monongahela, at the fording-place, which to this day bears the name of their ill-fated leader. The scarlet columns of the British regulars, complete in martial appointment, the rude backwoodsmen with shouldered rifles, the trains of artillery and the white-topped wagons, moved in long procession through the shallow current, and slowly mounted the opposing bank. Men were there whose names have become historic: Gage, who, twenty years later, saw his routed battalions recoil in disorder from before the breastwork on Bunker Hill; Gates, the future conqueror of Burgoyne; and one destined to a higher fame, — George Washington, a boy in years, a man in calm thought and self-ruling wisdom." — (Parkman: *The Conspiracy of Pontiac.*)

In even the first passage, which is uncommonly abrupt, even for Emerson, and in which

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balance is sacrificed to energy, it will be noted that the last sentence is prolonged into a cadence. Abundant examples of what may be handily called "paragraph cadence" are to be found also in Macaulay, J. R. Green, and other historians of the energetic type; whereas the balance and plangency of Parkman follows the Gibbon, Johnson, Burke tradition.

On the subject of stylistic origins, however, it is not wholly safe to speculate. But one may remark that the very common trick, in English prose, of doubling words, of being not content to say a thing with one word when two will do, may revert to the time when many things, to be understood of the multitude, had to be read aloud. In any event the national habit finds expression in such phrases as "all sorts and conditions of men," "humble and hearty thanks," "live and move and have our being," "the glass of fashion and the mould of form," "unhousel'd, disappointed, unaneled," and many such phrases very agreeable to recite. The books from which they are taken have had a very large effect on English style.

Of the preceding quotations, two facts should be noted: (1) Whatever rhythm or cadence they have is, on the whole, peculiar to them; they illustrate therefore the fact of the existence of rhythm rather than set up a model of rhythm to be followed. For (2) they are all exceptional passages; they are either renowned or have to

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be laboriously hunted up to prove the point. Let us therefore quote a more ordinary passage just to illustrate rhythm and cadence in any writing. Here is a random passage done by a competent hand but conspicuous in no respect, in which, however, rhythm and cadence go a long way toward keeping up the movement: I take the last paragraph that I have read in a book that I happen to be reading:

"For a whole generation at least this question [*i. e.*, of the inheritance of acquired characteristics] has been pressing for an answer, and yet no progress has been made with it. Yet if a tenth, or even a hundredth, part of the money which is devoted to research in physical science, in order to add to our material comforts and conveniences, could be diverted to promote the study of animal behaviour, this problem could be rapidly solved. For there is every reason to believe that the answer to it which is true of animals is true also of man." — (W. McDougall: *Psychology*.)

Stevenson, who played with sentences as a kind of game, had an interesting notion of movement which accounts for technical virtue in sentences in a different way from the foregoing explanation. This is simply that you dam up each sentence for a moment so that it may in the end flow faster, as when the dams saved the Union fleet in the Red River expedition; and all this quite apart from any regard for meaning of the sentence. His own words are these:

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"Communication may be made in broken words, the business of life be carried on with substantives alone; but that is not what we call literature; and the true business of the literary artist is to plait or weave his meaning, involving it around itself; so that each sentence, by successive phrases shall first come into a kind of knot, and then, after a moment of suspended meaning, solve and clear itself. In every properly constructed sentence there should be observed this knot or hitch; so that (however delicately) we are led to foresee, to expect, and then to welcome the successive phrases." — (*On Style in Literature.*)

The reader will observe that each of the two sentences quoted illustrates the point that Stevenson makes. He goes on to show some of the ways in which the knot may be tied:

"The pleasure may be heightened by an element of surprise as, very grossly, in the common figure of the antithesis, or, with much greater subtlety, where an antithesis is first suggested, and then deftly evaded. Each phrase, besides, is to be comely in itself; and between the implication and the evolution of the sentence there should be a satisfying equipoise of sound; for nothing more often disappoints the ear than a sentence solemnly and sonorously prepared, and hastily and weakly finished. Nor should the balance to too striking and exact, for the one rule is to be infinitely various; to interest, to

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disappoint, to surprise, and yet still to gratify; to be ever changing, as it were, the stitch, and yet still to give the effect of an ingenious neatness."

This is an extreme technical aspect of the matter and it is highly entertaining; but it may be seriously questioned if an appeal to the facts of what is usually regarded as pleasing literature would in all respects substantiate this interesting view.

The gist of this chapter lies in fact that style, in the aspect herein treated, may, to some degree, be regarded as a technical matter, as something apart from substance. One may choose words and rhythms simply because they are more agreeable. He may go so far as to distort a word from its usual meaning for the sake of the alliteration or balance; as did Ruskin on more than one occasion; for example, "We usually believe in immortality, so far as to avoid preparation for death; and in mortality, so far as to avoid preparation for anything after death." — (*A Crown of Wild Olive.*) One may even go so far, though this is not advised by the best authorities, as did the man in *The Gilded Age*, by Mark Twain and C. D. Warner: "Jeff Thompson can out-engineer any civil engineer that ever sighted through an aneroid, or a theodolite, or whatever they call it — *he* calls it sometimes one and sometimes the other — just whichever levels off his sentence neatest, I reckon." It is important, in any event, that style should swing

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along as rapidly and smoothly as the matter will permit. This may be the result of natural vigor and of fire for one's subject; it may be aided by the employment of a more or less mechanical balance; it may be due to a judicious revision of one's words and phrases until they go trippingly over the page. In any case the old precept holds good, that the pains and the mechanism should not appear, that the effect should be as in the oft-told story of Tennyson, who said that he had smoked three cigars over a line that seemed to be most spontaneous.

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# CHAPTER X

## STYLE AND COMPOSITION

In the foregoing pages composition and style have been treated as independent matters and each has been analyzed in some of its more important aspects. The object of such examination of parts is, as has been said, to call attention to various points to which heed may be given in the important matters of planning and revision. It must also be constantly borne in mind that such isolation of parts does not at all correspond with the actual process of composition, any more than the "cinematograph method," referred to in Chapter I, describes the actual process of our sensations and perceptions. Even if we go a step farther and attempt to connect style with composition, difficulties of the same kind will arise; it will still be impossible to give a satisfactory picture of what writing, as an active process, really is. Certain questions as to what, for want of a better term, may be called "relativity of style" may, however, be considered; for a frequent inquiry regards the relation which style bears to certain kinds of composition, to occasions, and to subjects. Such relations are



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implied in familiar phrases like "a good narrative style," "journalistic writing," "a command of popular exposition," "a sound style of argument," "a charming bedside manner," and many others concerning which the funny papers often vent themselves in jest and satire. A good narrative style, for example, is popularly supposed to bristle with active verbs and short, swift, sentences; a journalistic style suggests sententiousness and a solemn concern for the public weal, the settlement of the affairs of the universe in a few paragraphs; a popular style, as in the magazines, has to be vivacious, "catchy," and entertaining.

The phrases are well enough in an inexact way, and are convenient. But trouble comes, as very frequently, when a narrator or journalist or preacher assumes the qualities associated with the particular style to be the matter of prime importance. Of this habit of mind, this predilection for imitating the wrong thing, Lord Morley says in a characteristically brilliant passage:

"Two men of very different kinds have thoroughly impressed the journalists of our time, Macaulay and Mr. Mill. Mr. Carlyle we do not add to them; he is, as the Germans call Jean Paul, *der Einzige*. And he is a poet, while the other two are in their degrees serious and argumentative writers, dealing in different ways with the great topics that constitute the matter and

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business of daily discussion. They are both of them practical enough to interest men handling real affairs, and yet they are general or theoretical enough to supply such men with the large and ready commonplaces which are so useful to a profession that has to produce literary graces and philosophical decorations at an hour's notice. It might be said of these two distinguished men that our public writers owe most of their virtues to the one, and most of their vices to the other. If Mill taught some of them to reason, Macaulay tempted more of them to declaim: if Mill set an example of patience, tolerance, and a fair examination of hostile opinions, Macaulay did much to encourage oracular arrogance, and a rather too thrasonical complacency; if Mill sowed ideas of the great economic, political, and moral bearings of the forces of society, Macaulay trained a taste for superficial particularities, trivial circumstantialities of local colour, and all the paraphernalia of the pseudo-picturesque.

"Of course nothing so obviously untrue is meant as that this is on account of Macaulay's own quality. What is empty pretension in the leading article, was often a warranted self-assertion in Macaulay; what in it is little more than testiness is in him often a generous indignation. What became and still remain in those who have made him their model, substantive and organic vices, the foundation of literary character

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and intellectual temper, were in him the incidental defects of a vigorous genius." — (*Macaulay.*)

Thus, New England is said to have blossomed with a "small infantry" of Emersons, of whom some are still extant; and there are many other examples.

Handy then as are such phrases as "narrative style" or "journalistic style" in summing up and suggesting certain aspects of writing, they are likely to err in putting the cart before the horse, or, to use a metaphor more suitable to modern methods of motion, in leaving the gasolene tank behind. Doubtless certain traditions of desirability in manner have grown up, and we assuredly do associate certain names with certain well-known kinds of writing; a man's manners, his pose, his unexpected turns, or half-expected turns, of phrase, may become his stock in trade and the chief minister to his fame and income. But, philosophically, the case is different. "To have a specific style," said Spencer (*The Philosophy of Style*), "is to be poor in speech." The cardinal fact is that style is never twice alike for the simple reason that it never says quite the same thing; its prime duty is to represent thought as exactly as possible, with the best possible movement. Any departure from this normal aim must necessarily be due to the quality of an audience and to the eminent desirability of having sentences and paragraphs run as smoothly as possible.

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Thus, if we look at narration, description, exposition, and argumentation, we shall find that styles differ. But that is really because the facts differ, or, in other words, because these kinds of composition are not doing the same thing. In the second place, differences in plan and manner are to some degree due to differences of occasion, time, space, and audience: it would be more exact, as well as inclusive, to say that time, space, and audience, as well as habit of mind, cause the selection and presentation of the facts to be somewhat modified. In any event, one will presumably write as smoothly, with as easy a technical movement, as one's ear and training permits one to write. Therefore, when we say that narrative style abounds in active verbs and short sentences, we really mean that active verbs represent action better than do, say, abstract nouns. But this statement is only very generally true. You will not find so many active verbs in the narrative of Mr. Henry James or De Quincey as in *Treasure Island* or *The Hound of the Baskervilles;* which is but an indication of the fact, or another way of stating the fact, that the matter is different. Description doubtless contains the names of many objects and many adjectives to describe them; but, then, any one who is describing has to deal with the names of objects and with appropriate adjectives. Exposition may use many particular words and many general words, concrete words

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and abstract words; there is no rule except that the expounder shall use such words of statement or of illustration or of what not, as shall state, or illustrate, or what not. Burke and Chatham are not palpably mightier men of argument than Mill or Darwin, but they did not argue about the same things, and hence are different. Again, if they are more flowery and persuasive in type, that is because active politics are a warmer matter for discussion than scientific analysis, and because the procedure of speech-making takes more promptly into consideration the prejudices and the immediate reactions of audiences.

Or again, there would be no special reason why a man of science might not cultivate a "journalistic" style if he wished to do so. The reason that he does not is probably because the facts with which he deals have to be exactly stated, at all hazards, and this exactness can often be compassed only by technical language; and because, also, his habit of mind is said to be chary of those far-reaching generalizations and all-embracing platitudes which are the delight and ornament of the press and the pulpit. There is, as a matter of fact, a noticeable dearth of good popular exposition of scientific matters, alike true to fact and "understanded of the public." A writer who can follow his facts truthfully and can at the same time temper his statement to his audience in an interesting way is a pearl of price, in proportion to the value of his facts.

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If such terms as "a journalistic style" are used, as not infrequently, in contempt, it is simply because any truth or value of facts is sacrificed to some assumption of style, to oracular utterance, or to clever sayings. Oratory is a special sinner in this way; hence there arises a fine array of names often applied to oratorical and linguistic effects — *tosh, bathos, buncome, rot, spellbinding, pompous, inflated, catchpenny, claptrap,* and the like. The shoemaker goes beyond his last: his words, in one detail or another, do not fit his facts.

Any justification for specific styles, apart from the matter to be expressed, lies, then, in their being a kind of lubricant. If an audience is used to a manner, if it will better grasp the subject and be impressed by a manner that it is used to, by all means that manner may be regarded as a good thing. Knowing what to expect — as that an opposition paper will always denounce the government, or that a book-reviewer will always treat isolated and exceptional details as if they were representative, or that Mark Twain is always funny, or Shakespeare always sublime and poetical, or Mr. Chesterton invariably paradoxical — is a great help in reading, even though there may be palpable exceptions to the formula. Dominant uniformity would be a great asset, as the youth thought who remarked that some of Montaigne's essays didn't sound a bit like Montaigne, was

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baffled by a note of facetiousness in the *Times*, and found himself unable to laugh at all the passages in *Huckleberry Finn*. "To have a specific style *is* to be poor in speech," and to attempt to find the laws for the relativity of style is to partake of the pastime of pursuing wild geese.

In general, the matter presents itself somewhat as follows: Certain things are to be said. These a writer arranges in any order that will be most comprehensible, but the nature of the material makes one kind of composition fitter than another. The desideratum is so to arrange ideas that the easiest movement from one to another will result. Paragraphing may be a great aid in the movement, and such principles as unity and emphasis and coherence may properly be observed. When it comes to style, that is, manner of writing, the fundamental aim is to use such language as will most exacly stand for the ideas to be expressed, of whatever kind. The great question regarding any particular word, phrase, or sentence is this: "Does it say what I wish it to say in terms that will be understood?" Beyond that there arises the important question of taste, or interest, or smoothness — the question: "Could the expression be made more interesting or agreeable, without detriment to the idea?" Predication, connotation, and technical smoothness, that is, rhythm and cadence, are the main points to which attention may in detail be directed.

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The fundamental rule of writing is, then, to "write with your eye on the object." And the second is not at variance with it: Be as exact, use as interesting expressions as your subject and your audience will allow you to, and write as smoothly as you can; but do not cultivate *style* or dally with *a style*.

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# CHAPTER XI

## METHODS AND APPLICATIONS

SUCH as have been explained are the essential facts about composition and style; and such are the principal points at which our formal knowledge of these matters may be applied to the actual process of writing. A final chapter may not improperly be given to a description of certain methods in current use for the acquisition of skill in composition. We have already seen what writing as a specific process really is: it is planning what you have to say, saying it, and revising it as much as may be convenient or necessary before giving it to an antagonistic or amenable audience. We have now to deal with matters of general preparation, though some reference to specific practice will be necessary. In the following pages nothing else is attempted than a recital of the more important matters as they have been actually advised or practised. The point is not to tell people how to write (the idea of doing such a thing!) but merely to summarize certain of the outstanding types of precept and of practice, which one may or may not take to heart. So various are these counsels



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that a good classification of them is somewhat difficult; but they may be conveniently treated under the heads of (1) knowledge and vocabulary, (2) imitation and (3) methods of practice. These divisions, as is but natural, run into each other at all points.

Vocabulary, that is, a knowledge of the meaning of words, is fundamental to writing, and hence a goodly amount of advice is given as to the acquisition of words. What the precepts amount to may best be seen if we regard everybody as having a speaking or a writing vocabulary — a vocabulary of expression — and a hearing or a reading vocabulary — a vocabulary, so to speak, of impression. That is to say, every one has a set of words that he uses in talk or in writing and a much larger number that he more or less clearly understands when he hears them or sees them in print. The second group is probably several times as large as the first, and for several reasons: no one person is likely to have so much occasion for many different words as are the many people whom he listens to or reads; the occasions for speaking are usually comparatively simple, calling for few words, which, again, are eked out by gesture and emphasis; one is likely to speak and write, ordinarily, of familiar things, but his reading may often take him into strange regions of thought; the speaker and writer, too, has to call up words from his storehouse, unaided, whereas every word that one hears or reads is

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bolstered up by context. There are many other reasons going to show that a man ordinarily understands five or ten times as many words as he can use or would be likely to use in the usual walks and talks of life.

Evidently the process of acquiring words for writing is (1) the adding to the reading vocabulary by extensive and intensive methods, — borrowing the farmer's phrase, — that is, by getting to know unfamiliar words, and by making familiar words more exact in denotation or rich in suggestion. The process is partly an affair of the dictionary, but it is more a matter of hearing and reading. (2) The second act is the transferring of as many words as possible from the realm of recognition to the domain of practical mastery. These are, as a matter of fact, the ways in which knowledge of words is gained, however much the process may vary in detail.

Following this, we actually find certain kinds of advice given for the enrichment and extension of our holdings in the mother tongue. At one extreme is literary browsing, wherein one wanders widely in writing, cropping ideas and words that are to his liking,

"Chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancy."

Some of these may stick. Herein one throws open larger fields for pasturage than are available in the ordinary range of talk, books, and newspapers. The method may be elaborated and the

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results made more definite by the use of dictionaries and explanatory notes. In general, it is by processes of this kind that the stream of literary and learned English, if such a thing may be regarded as apart from everyday English, is kept in motion in every increasing volume.

At the other extreme are the deliberate methods which counsel the explicit transference of so many words from one vocabulary to the other. Men have been known — Browning, for example, and Chatham — practically to learn the dictionary from end to end. But that was before the day of Dr. Murray and the *Century;* and in any event the task is reserved for special souls. Better advice for ordinary mortals is such as is given by Professor G. H. Palmer in a valuable and stimulating little book, *Self-Cultivation in English,* which suggests the acquisition of two new words a day. The 14,600 words that one would acquire by this method in twenty years (not allowing for leap years) would, when conjoined to one's former outfit and one's pickings up by the way, probably make one the literary Carnegie of the generation — provided he could find any means for disposing of all his wealth. Even the Immortal Bard of Avon hadn't so many words as this, though, to be sure, he had a lively habit of using any word in about any sense that came handy. The practice takes very little time when the habit is once set up.

A very special and limited kind of advice

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regarding vocabulary is to be found in the many extant "don't say," or "don't use" books. Standing for this type are lists of words commonly mispronounced or misspelled or misused, tables of "preferable expressions," and many other worthy compilations. Logically, they do no more than "stake out the claim" of style, but they are very useful for any one who, wishing to avoid current solecisms and inferior idioms, makes up his mind to conform to conventional literary usage. Errors cited in such books are by no means of equal moment, but any one is safe in sticking to the text, provided he does not make his knowledge an occasion for the display of the *odium philologicum*. Such books do not and are evidently not intended to take the place of the more positive and valuable acquisitions of which we have spoken.

A far more important kind of advice, therefore, a piece of advice having to do with the real functions of words, is always to regard them as standing for ideas, that is, for objects, data, concepts, feelings, etc. In one sense, it is impossible to learn words apart from ideas; for a word will convey no meaning whatever if we are not in some way acquainted — directly, or by description, or by inference — with some part of the idea for which it stands. All vagueness and ambiguity of wording is at bottom the result of indefinite application of word to idea. The idea is the important thing; the word merely

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represents that. The good word habit is simply the habit of using the word ordinarily associated with the idea that one wishes to express; the excellent word habit, that of making these familiar words suggest new meanings and ideas. The necessity of thinking of ideas and of knowing the words that will stand for these ideas has often been insisted upon: you will find Newman's words about the matter in *The Idea of a University* and admirable illustrations of it in Mark Twain's *Following the Equator* (Vol. 2, Chap. 25), and there are many others.

The acquiring of vocabulary, in any decent sense of the word, is primarily a matter of acquiring knowledge, whether of facts or of one's play on those facts. The statement may be made despite the well-known observation that many men of great learning do not write at all well; their literary skill does not keep up with what they know; they do not know how to write except in a bare, bald way. Hence a type of counsel arises regarding the material and the arrangement thereof. This has been propounded less for the sake of the erudite, than for that large class of young writers who, having subjects and some facts, do not know how to think in any terms at all useful to English composition — but it may also apply elsewhere. Suggestions are contained in series of questions, such as, "What does this subject mean?" "What do I know about it?" "What do I think about it, and

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why?" "Whither does it lead?" "Why is it interesting?" "How may it be divided?" "Will my reader be interested in it or understand it as I do?" "What do I wish to say to my correspondent?" The answers to such questions, though they may never result in a lively style, will often set a literary ball a-rolling; and to set something going and keep up the sense of motion is, as we have seen, essential to composition.

Hence arises a variety of counsels regarding planning or arrangement of material, and these fall into the extremes of the desultory and the formal methods. According to the first, ideas beget ideas, inspirations follow inspirations; you follow them whithersoever they lead. Much good literature has been produced on this principle, as witness Emerson, Hazlitt, Holmes, and many others, but it is not usually so much recommended for the purposes of instruction as is the more formal type. In the latter you make deliberate arrangements: you may be advised, for example, to plot out your work with great care; perhaps the best way, certainly a good way, is to write down separate ideas on separate slips of paper, and when all are there, to shift them about, as in a sort of stylistic solitaire, till a good order comes out. Or one is advised to jot down on separate sheets what a thing is, what it is not, what it is like, or to set down facts in one column and opinions in another. All such schemes

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and devices are a great help in the early stages of engineering ideas for publication. But, as we shall see later, there is no warrant for laying down any law in this matter.

The term "literary browsing," used a few paragraphs previously, suggests another general method or set of processes by which the acquisition of the writing trick is sometimes advised. Herein are comprised the various phenomena of imitation. We recognize the large part that imitation plays in the formation of habits and customs and in the general development of youth; we might, omitting such evident truths, go so far as to say that without imitation there could be no such thing as literary tradition. Hence imitation may be called the salt or the prophylactic of literature. Now, so far as composition is concerned, imitation may be merely oozing and seepage, or, at the other extreme, it may be very deliberately carried on. Their bearing on English composition is but a small part of the alleged value of "Lists of One Hundred Best Books," of "Five Foot Shelves," of Emerson's advice to avoid all books less than five years old (or was it one? In any event, his own readers did not follow his advice), of "standard" reading, and many other things which all of us in our moments of moral levity are accustomed to waft to solemn young audiences. Of deliberate imitation one may profitably cite the classical examples of Franklin and Stevenson

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as instances of what the method is alleged to have accomplished. The former, in his *Autobiography*, tells us that being delighted with an odd volume of the *Spectator*, he set himself to imitate it. "With this view I took some of the papers, and making short hints of the sentiment of each sentence, laid them by a few days, and then, without looking at the book, tried to complete the papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length, as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should come to hand. Then I compared my *Spectator* with the original, discovered some of my faults, and corrected them." He goes on to tell how, finding his vocabulary insufficient, he turned prose tales into verse; "and, after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again." Besides the imitation, the value of the practice in verse lay in the fact that "the continual occasion for words of the same import, but of different length, to suit the measure, or of different sound for the rime, would have laid me under the constant necessity of searching for variety, and also have tended to fix that variety in my mind, and make me master of it." He also "jumbled his collections of hints into confusion," in order, after some weeks, to "reduce them to the best order, before I began to form the full sentences and complete the paper."

Stevenson tells us in *A College Magazine*, that

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though he constantly practised description and other forms of composition, and kept diaries, the most efficient part of his training lay in imitation. The former method, "only taught me (so far as I have learned them at all) the lower and less intellectual elements of the art, the choice of the essential note and the right word, — things that to a happier constitution had perhaps come by nature. And regarded as training it had one grave defect; for it set me no standard of achievement. So that there was perhaps more profit, as there was certainly more effort, in my secret labors at home. Whenever I read a book or a passage that particularly pleased me, in which a thing was said or an effect rendered with propriety, in which there was either some conspicuous force or some happy distinction in the style, I must sit down at once and set myself to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful, and I knew it; and tried again, and was again unsuccessful and always unsuccessful; but, at least, in these vain bouts I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony, in construction, and in the co-ordination of parts." And he goes on to tell us that he "played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt," and other conspicuous writers of quality. And he concludes, giving instances — Keats, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Burns — of the practice of imitation, "That, like it or not, is the way to learn to write; whether I have profited or not, that is the way."

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Doubtless that is *a* way, and a very good one, if you have the time and energy. There are also many other ways, and some of the forms that exercises in composition tend to assume may profitably be named. Training in composition is far more extensive to-day than ever before; writing tends to become a democratical rather than an aristocratical pursuit. Large masses of young people, especially in America, are subjected to exercises in composition. Four types of exercise may be mentioned.

First, there is the translation type. Herein, ideas are given one ready-made; one has no trouble with seeking ideas or with arranging them. All one has to do is to render the ideas into English. Just what English may mean in this connection is a trifle uncertain: it may be English equivalent in quality to the quality of the original; it may be good literary English; it may be free rendering, or exact translation, or various other things about which there is a good bit of disputing, as may be judged from a perusal of Arnold's *On Translating Homer*. In any event, the student busies himself with style. Enthusiasts for the method maintain that this is the only way to learn to write, and evidently such arguments crystallize into the common saying that the only way to learn to write English is through the study of the classics, which are said to have the further advantage of being less inflated than ordinary English. Then when a young man is

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sufficiently trained in rewording foreign ideas, he may be turned loose on ideas of his own. This is, on the whole, the alleged traditional British type of practice, and it may be conveniently designated as such.

Another kind of practice, probably not used to anything like its full value in England and America, consists in writing out sentences, singly and successively, in a variety of ways, in order to acquire the sense of shades of meaning. This method of training is said to be of French origin and to be used very extensively in France. To its use in French schools is sometimes attributed the variety and flexibility and exactness that distinguish French style over the style of other peoples.

In America, especially, a good deal of time is spent on analysis: you watch how the thing has been done, not for the purpose, as did Stevenson, of imitating that thing, but in order to see the processes — in sentence, paragraph, and longer work — and apply any observed principles to your own ideas. Analysis takes several forms. There is the so-called "rhetorical analysis," wherein "effects" and other kinds of data are noted, and the causes analyzed. On its more mechanical side, no form of intellectual exercise ever resulted in the production of a greater variety of entirely uninteresting and, for the purposes of composition, of wholly useless facts, as that Macaulay's sentences average about

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twenty-three words, or that Keats has so many grays, so many blue-greens, so many yellows, purples, ultra-violets in *Lamia* and so many in *The Eve of St. Agnes;* or that, since Burke uses such and such percentage of Latin words, and since Burke is as good a writer as is, therefore a good style contains so and so many per cent of Latin derivatives. On the other hand, an analysis which reveals any individual and characteristic tricks or turns of style and expression may easily be fruitful both in appreciation and in composition.

Analysis also takes the form of examining structure, of making paragraph summaries, briefs, and other digests of good pieces of composition. The aim is to inculcate, by good, careful work, the idea of structure. And the fact is that when a student has worked over a score of good pieces of different kinds on different subjects, noting occasions and dispositions, he will have a much better notion of order and the possibilities of arrangement than he could probably get in any other way. He may not wish to imitate any one of these, but he has a set of very valuable tools to help him carve out his own ideas.

Another form of analysis is running summary, and it is a very good thing to practise, not only for style but for the training of the mind. Unlike the method used by Franklin, you try to reproduce, in shorter space, not the form, but

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the idea, in as good English as you can. Practically, it is a very useful kind of training; for to know how to state the gist of an idea, a situation, a scene, is a valuable acquisition. Provided one attends to expression by the way, the summary method of practice has obvious advantages over translation, in that one has to do a little organizing for oneself. These methods of analysis and summary may, to carry out the loosely applied figure with which we started, be called the American type of exercise. These epithets are, obviously, not exclusive.

A fourth type of exercise, not translation, or sentence-making, or analysis of whatever kind consists in formal practice in various forms of writing — narration, description, etc. Mr. Frederic Harrison speaks "with sorrow" of "the habit which has grown up in the university (Oxford) since my day — the habit of making a considerable part of the education of the place to turn on the art of serving up gobbets of prepared information in essays more or less smooth and correct — more or less successful imitations of the viands that are cooked for us daily in the press." — (*On English Prose.*) The objection does not appear to be very weighty. Granted that it is worth while trying to learn to express oneself with more ease and accuracy than come to the untutored mind, why should any reasonable means for furthering that end be neglected, so long as more important matters are not thrust

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aside? As to this last clause, opinions naturally vary, but the phenomenon of a very widespread practice is evidently based on the fact, or the assumption of the fact, that such methods produce good results and that the matter is of sufficient concern to warrant making the effort. It is worth while to learn to write respectably, and if one is to learn to write respectably, it is better that he begin under tutelage than be left wholly unguided — unless he is a genius. That is, of course, the justification for the traditional exercises in Latin verse in English universities and for the elaborate courses in literary forms, particularly in the short story and in argumentative composition that are just now much in vogue in American higher education. In any event, be one's judgment of these matters what it may, we have here a fact which typifies one of the avenues to the acquirement of English composition, of which it is the business of this chapter to speak.

Valuable as are all these various precepts, principles, and practices, they all come down to one thing, the major piece of counsel in composition — that to learn to write it is necessary to keep writing. Advocates — and there are ardent ones — of one or another method, nevertheless agree in this, — that to learn to write one must write and keep writing. The great rule of writing is to write as much as one can on subjects that interest one, disdaining no help of any kind, tapping formal criticism, friendly

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advice, the practice of distinguished men, the trials of the audience or the press — but keep writing, keep composing, keep looking for better expressions. The great Swift tells us that during his residence with Temple he had "these seven weeks I have been here . . . writ and burnt, and writ again upon all manner of subjects, more than perhaps any man in England." — (Letter to Rev. John Kendall, February 11, 1691–2.) De Quincey, Montaigne and hosts of other writers wrote on anything that happened to interest them; and interest presumably begot interest. It can be only through desire and constant experiment that skill in writing is acquired.

The types of method that have been spoken of are but crystallizations, so to speak, of a vast flux of suggestions and practices, wherein the most likely, ornamental, and tangible are put on show. Actual practice is rarely one thing. Let us for a moment consider the examples of a number of illustrious men of letters who have left us some hint of their ways of working and the ease and certainty with which they have achieved results. Just what has happened is usually a little hard to get at, but the main point is clear — that there is no uniformity of practice or of result. Addison, for example, is said to have revised or rewritten some of his *Spectators* as many as eight times; it is not likely that these correctings meant complete revision and rewriting, but that, for the most part, they played with

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particular paragraphs or fussed with the phraseology of a comparatively few sentences. Macaulay, it is pretty certain, dashed off his pages at a great rate. Trollope tells us that he was accustomed to write for three hours a day, devoting the first half-hour to the revision of his previous day's stint, and producing two hundred and fifty words every fifteen minutes of the remaining time; but one may not take such a statement too exactly with men of imagination. Pater offers a contrast to Trollope's method, in that he wrote on every other line, in order to allow plenty of space for correction, which, when made, called for a fresh copy on every other line, with spaces for further additions and corrections. In spite of all this care and the comparatively small bulk of production, Pater is not obviously a better writer than, say, Swift, who, to judge from a passage in *The Journal to Stella* regarding the pamphlet on *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue*, could produce several, perhaps as many as six or seven, thousand words of great lucidity in the course of a day. Ruskin tells that he took "extreme pains" with parts of *A Crown of Wild Olive*, of which the Introduction "was written very carefully to be read, not spoken"; Newman often revised chapters "over and over again" even till late in life; Mill was accustomed to correct all his correspondence with great care, making a fair copy for

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the post; Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and Fitzgerald's rendering of *Omar Khayyam* are classic examples of the good that can be done by revision. Practice is evidently very diverse; the only really constant thing is apparently that most writers of eminence have, at some or all points in their career, felt the necessity of taking pains.

Results are not more certain. From this point of view the literary life histories, so to speak, of famous men are interesting. The life history of the works of Shakespeare, for example, has been made a considerable subject of exposition, often with a lively and compelling fancy: stages are traced, and names given to these stages, whereby he went through experiment and experience until he became the practised hand that could turn off anything, and was successful in all. To set this growth up as a fact is, of course, not the same thing as to explain why it is so. But the fact is always an interesting one in any case where it can be stated. Thus Addison, say, and Lamb, each known popularly for one preëminently successful thing, came up to the one thing through a series of comparative failures, the steps of which can be traced. Abounding geniuses, on the other hand, like Swift, De Quincey, and Dickens, appear to be abounding possibly because we have not enough facts to trace their previous training. Barring a few slight fragments, *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle*

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*of the Books, The Confessions of an English Opium Eater* and *Pickwick Papers*, are the earliest known works of their authors, produced later in life in the case of Swift and De Quincey than of Dickens. The point is that these writers sprang into notice with a style all formed, in its flexibility, its intricacy, its dash, or what not, and made no conspicuous variations or improvements in the long course of following years. They applied a style to whatever came up to interest them, as did Dr. Johnson who, having somewhere acquired the well-known Johnsonian manner, applied it equally to parliamentary reports, to *Ramblers*, and to polite conversation, leaving his mark on countless generations of high-school valedictorians and other youthful essayists. To such men as Swift it is convenient to apply the term genius, but the word may merely cover up a multitude of facts that are not to be ascertained. Instances of life history might be multiplied, but they would merely enforce the conclusion that there is no royal rule for writing. It is preëminently a practical matter, and in practical matters the only thing is to practise.

In sum, writing is always a specific enterprise, on which we must all embark, deeply or occasionally. Most of what we say or write is determined by some desire to say our say. So far as it is a matter of deliberation, the little that can be done demands as much foresight as possible. It is the task of formal English composition to

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make some statement of the ways in which foresight may get in its work. This is based on what has been done in literature and on the facts of language. The results are on the knees of the gods, — that is, of our parents, our preceptors, our patrons, our publishers, and our public.

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# NOTE ON BOOKS

The array of books dealing with general or special matters of English Composition is very imposing. If the reader wishes to study the subject historically, material will be found in nearly all essays on critical theory from Sidney and Puttenham down to the present day. Of the more strictly rhetorical guides the following are as representative as any of the course which the study of formal English Composition has taken:

*The Art of Rhetoric.* By Thomas Wilson (1553).
*Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres.* By Hugh Blair.
*A Philosophy of Rhetoric.* By George Campbell.
(The two foregoing belong to the eighteenth century.)
*The Elements of Rhetoric.* By Richard Whately.
*English Composition and Rhetoric.* By Alexander Bain.
*The Principles of Rhetoric.* By Adams Sherman Hill.
*English Composition.* By Barrett Wendell.

The facts of the English language are popularly described in the following books among many others:

*Words and their Ways in English Speech.* By James Bradstreet Greenough and George Lyman Kittredge.
*The English Language.* By Logan Pearsall Smith.

On the theory of style the following essays are the best known:

*Style.* By Thomas De Quincey.
*The Philosophy of Style.* By Herbert Spencer.



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*Style.* By Walter Pater.
*On Style in Literature.* By Robert Louis Stevenson.
(These and others are collected in *Representative Essays on the Theory of Style.* Edited by W. T. Brewster.)

On special forms, there are no outstanding books on narration, description, and exposition of great practical value. Such essays as Mr. Henry James's *The Art of Fiction*, Stevenson's *A Humble Remonstrance*, and Mr. Howells's *Criticism and Fiction* are variously entertaining and stimulating. There is much writing on argumentation from its logical to its legal side; *The Principles of Argumentation*, by George Pierce Baker, is perhaps the best practical résumé of the subject. An interesting special book is *Paragraph Writing* by Fred Newton Scott and Joseph Villiers Denney; and one of the most thorough of the *vade-mecums* of correct discourse and of the conventions of composition is *A Handbook of Composition*, by Edwin C. Woolley, though it may be questioned whether any book of this character is at all points equally applicable to all English-writing countries.

For practical purposes what a writer needs more than anything else is a sound modern dictionary, such as *The New English Dictionary* or *The Century Dictionary*, or good abridgments of them. The reason is that the essence of all good writing is that other people should know what a writer means when he uses a word, and the writer himself should know something about this. Any good rhetoric book, such as Professor Hill's referred to above, or a general treatise like Professor Wendell's *English Composition*, are good complements to the dictionary. The question of excellence among the many books of this sort is to be determined by personal preference and applicability. To have much practical value they should, of course, be modern.

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